Journal of the
Krishnamurti Schools

Krishnamurti Foundation India

No 23, January 2019

JOURNAL OF THE KRISHNAMURTI SCHOOLS

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An Educational Journal

This is a journal on education brought out annually. It is an anthology of writings by educators, teachers, and thinkers exploring a vision of education in its many dimensions—philosophy, psychology, classroom experience, curriculum, nature and environment, and contemporary issues. It lays a special emphasis on J Krishnamurti's principles of education, and will be of use to teachers, parents, educational administrators, teacher-educators, and anyone interested in education.

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Outside India US$3 by Bank Draft in favour of Krishnamurti Foundation India or by Pay Order.
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Published Annually By:

Krishnamurti Foundation India
124–126, Greenways Road,
RA Puram,
Chennai - 600 028
Email: info@kfionline.org
Website: www.journal.kfi.org

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Kindly share this Journal, after your perusal,
with a school nearby or a school you know,
or a teacher who you feel will enjoy this,
so that it reaches more educators.

Many thanks
The Editors

PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME

Time is one of the most complex things to understand. It is fairly simple to understand it intellectually, but to see the meaning of it, to understand the nature of time, the significance of time, the depth of time, we must not only understand chronological time by the watch in our pocket or on our wrist, but also we must understand and observe the psychological thing which creates time as yesterday, today and tomorrow. Time is a movement, a total thing, and if we break it up into yesterday, today and tomorrow we are caught in the bondage of time. Then we develop theories of gradualism, or of immediacy, the 'now'. There is the gradual theory, that gradually human beings will become more benevolent, more kind, more this and more that. We see the utter hopelessness of dependence upon a future life, the future being the tomorrow, upon the gain that will take place in a few months, years or centuries. That again is a fragmentation of time. In all that we are caught, and therefore we do not understand the extraordinary movement of time without fragmentation. There is actually only time by the watch and no other time. That train goes by precisely at this time every day, and if you would catch it you must be at the station at the time it leaves. Otherwise you will miss it. Chronological time has to be observed exactly. The observation of time by the watch is not a contradiction, is not a fragmentation of that other time.

Time which is not of the watch is invented by memory, by experience or by the centre that says, "I will be something". There is the question of death and its postponement by avoiding it, pushing it away. Thought makes for the fragmentation of time which, except chronological time, does not actually exist. We do not understand that extraordinary movement of time in which there is no fragmentation, because we are always thinking of what I was, what I am and what I will be. All that is the fragmentation of psychological time, and you cannot do anything about it, except listen. You cannot say, "I will get rid of time and live in the present because it is only the present that matters". Actually, what does 'the

present' mean? The present is only the result of the past, but there is an actual present if there is no fragmentation of time. I hope you see the beauty of this.

Time for us becomes of enormous importance, not chronological time, not going to the office every day, taking the train, the bus, keeping an appointment. All that is very trivial. We have to do it, but what is important is psychological time, which we break up into yesterday, today and tomorrow. We are always living in the past. 'Now' is the past, because the 'now' is the continuation of memory, the recognition of what has been, which cannot be altered, and what is going on at the present time. Either we live in the memory of youth, in the remembrance of things that have been, or we live in the image of tomorrow. We live lives of gradual decay, of gradual withering. With the coming on of senility, the brain cells become weaker and weaker, lose all their energy, vitality and force. Therein lies the great sorrow. As we grow older, memory disappears and we become senile, which is the repetition of what has been. That is how we are living. Though we are very active, we are senile. In the present, in the moment of action we are always living in the past, with its influence, its pressures, its strain, its vitality. All the knowledge which we have acquired and stored up through enormous struggle, through time, is knowledge of the past. Knowledge can never be of the present. From that past knowledge we act, and that action is what we call 'the present'. That action is always engendering decay.

We are acting in the image, in the symbol, in the idea of the past; and that is the fragmentation of life. We invent philosophies, theories of the present; we live only in the present and make the best of it. Nothing else matters. Such living in the present is a despair, because time which has been divided into the past, the present and the future only brings about despair. Knowing despair, we say, "It doesn't matter; let's try and live in the now, in the present, because everything is meaningless. All action, all life, all existence, all relationship, everything must end in the division of time and therefore in despair, in decay, in trouble". Please do listen, because we can't do anything about it. That is the beauty of what will take place if we do nothing but listen. This doesn't mean that we are going to accept what is being said; there is neither acceptance nor denial. It is stupid for anyone to say, "I am living in the present". It doesn't mean a thing. It is equally stupid to say, "I deny the past". We can deny the past, but we are the result of the past. Our whole functioning is from the past. Our beliefs, our dogmas, our symbols, the particular line we are trying to follow, whatever it is, is still the result of the past, which is time. We have broken up time into the past, the present and the future. This naturally breeds fear, fear of life which is not of time, and the movement of time which is not broken up into yesterday, today and tomorrow. That movement of time can be perceived totally only when there is no fragmentation, when there is no centre from which we look at life.

Eighth Public Talk in Saanen, Switzerland, 26 July 1966

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Editorial

As I packed my bag for the editors' meeting this year, a friend bid me goodbye, saying, "It's going to be a lot of work, so get some rest." It struck me that while the hours are long and the computer screens blaze into the night during these meetings, the work is very enjoyable. We receive thoughtful articles from a number of teachers describing work of a very high quality. It is easy for 'outsiders' to underestimate a teacher's work, and to assume there's nothing much to it. At the same time, millions of parents all over the world trust teachers to care for and educate their children. This combination of under-appreciation and responsibility can be quite a challenge to work with, and yet out of it emerges such creativity in daily work. Knowing this, the editors of this *Journal* have for years cheerfully nudged and nagged teachers to write about their experiences and reflections, for readers from a wider world of education.

This twenty-third issue has the usual variety, with something in the contents to interest just about anybody. There are articles on educational practice, on curriculum, on perennial questions about human nature, and at least two that invite us to take a step back and ask—what are we educating *for?* And something that happened quite serendipitously this year—a poetry section!

We begin with a talk by Kabir on his quest as an educator—to discover a "…very different movement of learning which is really about the brain becoming extraordinarily sensitive, becoming extraordinarily alert to the movements of thought." Jeff's article is a meditation on our 'spiritual' longing for wholeness and the separation of the self from the vast movement of life. We went astray long ago—was it when we invented words, or fire or the wheel?! With humour and irony, he points out the futility of knowledge and organised search and suggests other ways of being in the world. Keerthi examines the ancient human tendency to divide

the world into an 'us' and a 'them'. She explores how this plays out in a school environment and how our questions as teachers could break up this seemingly automatic tendency. Renu's describes a rich theme meeting with parents and teachers as joint caretakers exploring a variety of concerns about our growing adolescents.

Ashton MacSaylor does a thorough analysis of misguided forms of assessment practice in schools in the United States—practices that go against our deepest intentions in caring schools such as ours. Afshan's piece reminds us how important it is to think about the design of physical spaces for learning. Her suggestions are easy to implement even in already constructed brick-and-mortar buildings. Sumitra writes about the emotional life of a residential school, reflected in the words of its inhabitants. Anantha Jyothi brings to our attention an emotional jewel we often neglect—vulnerability—and urges us to reap its powerful learning potential. Ramanujam gives us a wider perspective on the hotly debated issue of technology in classrooms, rescuing us from the endless yes-or-no dilemma by redefining technology itself. Thejaswi writes about a unique biology mini-course that encompassed history, sociology, philosophy and ethics in one heady, integrated experience.

In the special poetry section, Karen Hesli draws upon the power of poetry to open up our psychological worlds and explore their deepest layers with students. We thought it would be apt to follow this article with quietly illuminating contributions from our very own teacher-poets—O R Rao, Ramesh, Siddhartha and Jeff.

Stephen's piece on dialogue is a reminder that there is the possibility of listening and awareness in daily living that dissolves the boundaries of the separated self. Shashidhar defines the 'major' and the 'minor' aims of education, and lays out the paradox of 'pursuing' the awakening of intelligence. Following this, the editors have written an imaginary dialogue between two people about creating a school curriculum from scratch. And finally, we carry two book reviews by Venkatesh and Gautama. The first reviews *Sapiens* by Yuval Noah Harari and considers its potential for insight into human conditioning. The second invites readers to pick up an unusual story-based book for anyone who works with children, one that explores profound insights and addresses contemporary issues in a conversational, readable tone.

The meetings are nearly done. As the hours progress, we've become companions—the editors, the articles and their authors in absentia. The mind swirls with nice turns of phrase, misplaced colons, powerful truths, gems of expression, and the occasional looong sentence that refuses to be split into two. Now it is ready to be placed in your hands, readers. We hope you enjoy.

Kamala Mukunda

My Quest as an Educator*

Kabir Jaithirtha

Before I begin with education, I think it's good to have a sense of what Krishnamurti was talking about—about life in general, about humanity—and then see how that connects with education. It doesn't need a Krishnamurti to tell us that there is great disorder in the world—a great deal of violence, tremendous inequality, a constant sense of anxiety amongst people about their security, job and so on. You turn on the television and you see pictures of children being dragged from bombed-out cities, children dying of cholera, and all kinds of violence we seem to heap on ourselves. Either we accept that as part of the natural order, and carry on as best we can, or one can begin to question why this happens. In such a questioning, one can probably come across many explanations—one could blame politicians, one could blame social and political systems, one could blame technology; Karl Marx would have blamed the economic system and so on.

Krishnamurti pointed out that the disorder is really much more fundamental. It is not really some kind of outward disorder, which a certain amount of careful thinking can set right. But there is a deeper cause of this disorder and he pointed out convincingly, to me at least, that disorder in the human consciousness creates disorder in society, in the world as a whole. So, the disorder outside is not independent of what we are as human beings. He makes one more point: that human consciousness is one; it's not that there are separate individuals and that somehow each of their separate consciousnesses added together in some abstract way can be called the human consciousness. He is saying that our brains respond to this collective human consciousness. Just like language is a collective phenomenon, each of us contributing to and participating in the language we use, we contribute similarly to what could be called the human consciousness, and

* Editors' Note: Kabir Jaithirtha was a passionate educator for over four decades and a trustee of the Krishnamurti Foundation India. This article is based on a talk given by him in January 2018 at Vasanta Vihar in Chennai, a few months before his untimely passing.

participate in this human consciousness. And this consciousness has within it movements of violence, fear, desire, and a peculiar quality of feeling that each human being is psychologically separate from other human beings. Even in our closest relationships there is a sense of separation, a sense of being psychologically separate from the other. And further, there is not only a sense of 'me' being psychologically separate from 'you', 'us' being psychologically separate from 'them', our group being psychologically separate from other groups, but even within myself there is a strange quality of psychological separation as 'me' and 'my experiences'. Most of us, when we grow up, take for granted this psychological separation because we absorb it from the environment in which we are born; every one of our structures reflects the psychological separation. So like a child who absorbs language, we absorb the language of psychological separation, and begin to take it for granted that it is the most natural thing.

We also take it for granted that the feeling of 'me' as separate from 'my experiences'. We assume that it is a fact of life that that is so. I don't think I would have ever had the capacity to explore whether this is really so. So it needed, for someone like me, Krishnamurti to point out that that may not be a fact. That the feeling of psychological separation, though it is there, may be constructed and sustained by thought, something that exists as long as thought is actively supporting it and sustaining it, something that could come to an end when thought no longer supports it and sustains it. We see many such examples. If I consider you my enemy, my thought has to sustain the feeling that you are my enemy. As long as the thought sustains the feeling that you are my enemy, I consider you my enemy and function accordingly. If it stops sustaining that idea, that opinion, that you are my enemy, you are no longer my enemy. So it seems to me a tremendous discovery to find out that this psychological division which we take for granted, and which we assume is something inherent in nature, is not really so.

The question then arises—Is it possible to free the mind of this activity of division and separation? One might ask why should it be done; why not just live with that situation? I would like to suggest that the deeper force of disorder is the feeling of psychological separation. In this feeling of psychological separation there comes the possibility that you might be a threat to me, that your group might be a threat to my group. So, there is immediately a need to create boundaries and protect these boundaries. In the creation of these boundaries and the protection of these boundaries, there is inevitably going to be conflict and violence.

The other person's misery seems somewhat distant, somewhat removed from my existence. And so I can tolerate it if a child in Yemen dies of cholera because of the fighting there. Only when it comes very close to my house, do I begin to be

disturbed. So this feeling of psychological separation and division creates a profound lack of empathy, a profound lack of relationship between human beings. Therefore, without addressing this question of psychological separation and seeing whether it can be ended, you can never end human disorder. Every so-called leader has this sense of division and separation embedded within him. So when he functions, however much he wants to do something good, because his action is coming from a sense of division, inevitably it sustains the disorder that comes from division. And quite often, people who become leaders exploit this sense of division. They find it convenient to be able to use it to come to power. So it's really an extraordinarily important question that human beings have to examine and address. You cannot end violence through violence; you cannot end division through the activity of division.

We have to bring a different approach to it altogether. Whether in a school, or talking to the public, or in dialogues that Krishnamurti had with people, he was educating the mind. Educating not merely in terms of giving it some concepts and ideas, but bringing about the capacity for the mind to examine its own activity and its own movement. I would call that education. It seems to me very logical that, if you are really concerned about addressing this disorder, however small that action seems, you have to start with education. You have to start with creating the capacity to question this activity of thought which sustains and creates division. Therefore, for me, it seemed very, very simple to say that if I am really concerned with the human situation, education is what one starts with.

As we know, most education is concerned with the development of the intellect. The only function of education seems to be to create people who are producers and consumers, so that the economic activity can go on and go on expanding, regardless of what happens to the earth and regardless of how this activity can be destructive to mankind itself. And quite often we feel that what could be called moral education also is the creation of a set of values and imparting those values as information to children.

There may be a very different approach to education, of not merely the development of the intellect, but the bringing about of the capacity to examine the activity of thought, to bring about a capacity in children, not to take for granted this separative activity of thought, not to indoctrinate them and somehow get them to feel trained into some kind of submissive acceptance, even submissive acceptance of an idea that 'we are all one'. That doesn't work because the deeper movement is a feeling of separation. The deeper movement always overwhelms whatever training you can give to the mind on the surface. But there may be a possibility of the adult, the teacher, the parent and the child actually learning the art of examining the activity of thought as it happens within themselves, as it happens within them and their friends, as it happens in the school environment. And it seems to me that it is very obvious that this education, this capacity to observe the movement of thought and what it does, is as natural and as important as the capacity to learn mathematics or to learn physics or whatever. I would suggest that, in fact, without bringing about this capacity, we are betraying our children. We are condemning them to a life of anxiety which inevitably comes about when this feeling of separation is not examined. Anxiety in relationship, and emotions that come from this feeling of separation, happen because we take it for granted that it is natural. But when you begin to question it, when you begin to ask yourself if it is really so, if it is really possible to awaken the mind to this activity of thought, then you begin to find out that in fact in a school you can do a great deal.

In bringing up children, one can bring about such a capacity, even from a very young age, from the age of four, five, because it is not an intellectual examination, it's a simple, natural act of observing. And children in fact are very, very good observers. They are very observant of everything. But we never ask them to observe the activity of thought. The observing is happening outwardly all the time. I am not saying that the outward observation is not necessary. It is absolutely necessary to be able to look at the flower, to be able to look at the tree, to be able to look at the sky and the cloud, but equally it is possible to get the child to observe the activity of thought as it is happening within him or her. And when you begin to do that from a very young age, a different quality can come into being in the child.

So, is it possible? I would say it is possible. My quest as an educator for the last forty-odd years has been to find out what kind of environment, what kind of bringing together of people, will allow for such an exploration to happen. It might seem that in the modern world not very many people are very interested in this kind of a question, because the pressure to find security through a job or to find security through some kind of a skill seems so strong that very few of us really look at education in a different way. But fortunately, there are adults who want something different for their children. They may not be very clear what they are looking for, but when you begin to suggest that there is a totally different kind of education possible, people begin to respond to that; people begin to say yes, I would like to see if that can happen to my child.

Unfortunately, very often, we impose these structures of thought onto our children. Knowingly or unknowingly they absorb the way we act, the way we create division, and we impose it on them because for us that's the only way we function. But if we begin to engage together, the adults, the teachers and the parents, and we begin to ask ourselves whether it is possible to really examine within ourselves

our own emotions, our own fears, our own conflicts, in that very alertness, in that very engagement with that question, we begin to get the capacity to be able to communicate that to the children, not merely as ideas, not merely as opinions, but in a very direct and simple way. And that kind of an education might help the human being to be free of this extraordinary curse of feeling separate psychologically.

It is possible to start with a small group and I think if there are some schools, even if there are only a few, who are engaged with these questions, they have a way of creating an environment where other people begin to ask these questions. Other people who are interested in education come and say if you can do it, perhaps I can do it too. So it is very, very important that there are at least a few schools that are asking these questions. I wouldn't, therefore, worry about success, I wouldn't worry about numbers, and I wouldn't worry about whether this can ever spread to larger numbers. I think doing something like this with great intensity has its own effect on society and the environment. And, therefore, it is worth doing. It requires, as I said, a great deal of cooperation between the adults. So the way you set up the school, the way you invite teachers, the way you invite parents to come and have this education for their children—you have to take great care in all that.

If one is not doing that, it is very easy to slip into a situation where the education is primarily for the intellect and one tries to bring this in to a greater or lesser degree depending upon what the environment allows you. But if you are really, really concerned, it does seem to me, that there are people out there, who have some kind of economic security, who are saying I want something else for my child. I'd like to see if really my child has stability, a deep profound stability, which comes not merely from living in a happy environment, but which has a deeper quality because one has begun to really understand one's own nature, the way thought works, what it does, what its effects are and whether the mind can be free of that.

Krishnamurti used to talk of two kinds of learning. One is an accumulative learning where you are learning skills, ideas, opinions, all kinds of things. He used to constantly ask, Is there a learning which is not accumulative, which is not really the development of skills? It seems to me that the word *learning* unfortunately has got too narrowed down to primarily the accumulation of skills and knowledge. So the minute one uses the word *learning*, the mind immediately goes to the idea that at the end of it there must be a body of knowledge and a skill-set and a knowledge-set that can be examined and measured. But there may be a very, very different movement of learning which is really about the brain becoming extraordinarily sensitive, becoming extraordinarily alert to the movements of thought, to the habits and patterns that

thought creates. And in that very attention and sensitivity to the activity of thought, there is a certain kind of freedom. Whatever reactions we have accumulated, those reactions impose certain kinds of behaviour on us. So I accumulate a whole lot of reactions and these reactions come out in all my relationships. And there is an identification with these reactions, there's a feeling that this is 'me', and that makes it very difficult to really see if reactions could end, because these beliefs, these ideas, these reactions constitute 'me' and it becomes an existential crisis if I have to let go of all this.

But if the mind begins to see that this activity of thought brings about tremendous insecurity, not only in the individual, but in society as a whole, the very perception of that danger allows for a different movement of learning to happen. A movement of learning which is primarily a sensitivity, a profound alertness and an awakened quality where you are watching the activity of thought, and because there is that capacity to watch the activity of thought, the brain doesn't get identified with it and move along with that.

So it seems that from quite a young age it is possible to bring about this kind of education. We take it for granted that perhaps children are too young, and you can't really explain all these things to them, and therefore you need for them to get older, because again, we function from and we depend on the intellect. But if we allow the other capacities of the brain—the capacity to observe, the capacity to look, the capacity to listen, the capacity to be attentive—you begin to find that from a very young age you can communicate to children in a very direct way about what is happening, what kind of reactions are taking place, and what kinds of reactions are accumulating. And I feel, that's all one needs to do. You don't need to then try and do something to control these reactions, you don't need to try to somehow train the mind not to have these reactions. The very alertness, the very act of being awake to these reactions, brings its own order.

So, is it possible for this to be the primary concern of education? Of course, we see that the child also needs skills, needs a certain amount of knowledge. But I start from seeing whether the education is about awakening, attention, alertness, a certain kind of awakened state, and from there I begin to see what kinds of skills, what kind of knowledge are needed. If the adults, if the teachers, if the parents are interested, it seems to me, that this kind of education is as possible as the other kind of skill- and knowledge-based education.

I said that we take it for granted that the intellect is the primary instrument that the brain has. And we give it primacy in every act of looking, in every act of listening. The intellect immediately comes and labels something, categorises. So we really don't look, or listen completely. And therefore, all the time our understanding, what we call understanding, is guided by the intellect. The intellect creates an idea about something, and then uses that idea

to observe what is happening. We are all used to that, for that kind of analytical enquiry is very important and necessary if you have to create science, if you have to do mathematics. It seems to me that while we help our children learn skills, learn to analyse, learn to have a sophisticated way of using concepts and ideas, it is far more important to bring about in the children this capacity to just observe, to just listen. That word *just* seems to be very weak and incapable of doing anything. But in that *just observing, just listening*, there may be a tremendous vitality. And it may be that vitality which frees the mind from the patterns of psychological activity, and not any kind of control, not any kind of decision to be free.

So, very simply, it is worthwhile asking ourselves whether a totally different kind of education can come into being. I have a feeling that at the end of such an education the child who goes out of such a place will have a very different quality of intelligence, an intelligence which can meet society and not become part of it, which can meet the contradictory movements of society and not simply absorbed into it. That was Krishnamurti's concern with education. And that, it seems to me, is a very worthwhile intent to keep in mind and see if it can happen.

A Story Telling a Story

Origin and death of the 'self'

Jeff Welch

All experience, especially that of an educational bent—whether remembered accurately or not—builds the story of a fictional 'me', such as the one writing these words right now. All the accrued stories of my life define who I think I am, even including the stories around so-called self-knowledge, which is actually a 'story' telling a story. I'd like to unpack here all of our stories and to ask how have they helped us to live in the world. As I see it, little can be done to help the world, or ourselves actually, or rescue us from the disconnecting, storied past with its limited vision. Let's take one of the 'origin' stories or myths to try to understand more about this.

The metaphorical, biblical Adam had no stories to tell until he partook of the apple of knowledge, after which he apparently became the first actor on the planet, setting him apart from the other animals. This attracted thoughts of dominion and delusions of separation ('grandeur' in psychological parlance), raising him up above all of creation in both his eyes and later in the colluding eyes of other sapiens. This sowed the seeds that would ensure his own destruction as he began to destroy himself by destroying the world, oblivious to the connections and its obvious conclusion. Adam and Eve then used their new-found knowledge to pass on this dominant heritage for their children to act out, as the first education system evolved. And, as I recall, they begat and begat and begat.

Soon after, humans pined for that which had been lost—a connection that was terribly missed; and so they invented ways to fill this void with the so-called spiritual search—to find their place and meaning in the great scheme of things. And if not the spiritual search, then the material one or myriad variations on the theme, all of which would come back to bite them in the backside, or the backsides of the next generations; and here we are today, folks.

Each had scooped out a bucket of water from the stream of life, naming it 'the self', and tried to understand life's vast energy by exploring this tiny bucket. They thought that by modifying the water in the bucket through 'self-knowledge', they would somehow be able to affect the whole and fix any and all problems that would inevitably arise due to their myopia. They also looked for ways to escape from the inner sorrow and alienation arising from their sense of separation. They tried to escape the associated pain using drugs and diversions; hence the opioid and material addictions of today.

So this is our story—one of longing to get back to an imagined lost paradise. The very thing that thinks that it is above the animals and unconnected to the trees, wants to also partake in the beauty of their world, as long as it remains in control. There is the paradox—that is not possible. We forget that before knowledge, there is no comparison, no higher, no lower, no right or wrong, no morality. Anger was anger, tears just tears, and joy, joy; and we had no reason to act, no need to impress.

Our shared story can be followed in the analogy of one lifetime, from the embryo until the taking on of a separate self, a self-conscious entity, very early in childhood. After which time, we have to act out a part, to "strut and fret our hour upon the stage", always pining for that distant time when all was as it should be (but mostly only when the chips are down and we wonder as to our purpose). Generally we reinforce the mistaken belief that the earth was something created for man who can use and abuse it at will. Now that we have finally discovered that there are probably billions of planets like ours, we are faced with the irrationality of that premise.

As actors then, we ask the questions like, "Now that we have taken over control, what is our responsibility?" But this kind of question is coming from an actor, from our script of who we think we are. How can we say or trust from where our lines are coming from? Now, I too have no way of knowing where these lines came from. Is it not the same dichotomy of 'the mind that created the problem is not the mind that can solve it'? Is it not coming from the premise that knowledge can solve everything? This is often what is driving our school curricula and everything else in schools. Even this story cannot be fully understood, let alone expressed accurately in words, since it comes from the bucket, the bucket that we call ourselves. To understand it would be to pour the bucket back into the stream, and to end the self. Not that that can be done! (And, who'd want to do it anyway?).

Without a story or agenda, when we walk through a meadow, or other pathless regions, we may meander, much like Mary Oliver reports doing in her poems. To a bystander, steeped in the reins of time, it might seem purposeless, wasteful or whatever, but in the relaxed state of wandering, what other senses may emerge? An instinctive sense might flow through and we might or might not avoid treading on the flowers. However, it won't be because we 'should' or 'should not'. As we wander we might, or might not, smell the flowers, or the fresh bear poop, neither more important than the other, and both capable of giving instruction, even insight. As we ramble, completely connected to the world around us, our story quiet, our bodies relaxed, not contracted, we may become a channel for life to sense everything, so that we may see and do what it wants us to do. Will it direct our energies to change our schools? There is no answer from knowledge, but my guess is, do what you may from that energy, you can do no harm.

And now, bringing us to the present, here as I write, am I wandering or am I acting, and therefore contracting? I'm guessing it will be the latter because MY story is probably playing out, and I'll want you to like what I write; I'll want to be safe, just as you—for your own sake—might want me to be, and in so doing I separate myself from you by wearing my mask, my story, so that we may be comfortable, avoiding those words too close to the bone. In our classrooms, will we play out these stories in order to feel safe?

So, is there a happy ending to my story? Is there a way to connect? Is there something that I can do right now, or in my classroom, that will help repair the damage we see daily all around us, in which I am complicit and yet think I am separate from? We see modern-day Adams and Eves in our classrooms turning again to the new apple—the projected panacea of artificial intelligence—to solve ever more complex and sinister problems with the same mind that caused them in the first place, thereby reinforcing their illusions and separation. What will they do? Has each new 'apple of knowledge'—the word, fire, wheel, printing press, television, nuclear power or artificial intelligence—widened the separation, while deepening the illusion of progress? Each of us will have our own answer to these questions, coming from our particular and surely different (and yet similar) story. And therein lies both the rub and the possibility of much needed amazing grace. There is no one answer, no path except where we are now.

Teaching Philosophy of Science in a High School Classroom

Thejaswi Shivanand

Science can perhaps be experienced as an investigative approach to understanding the nature of the universe that is anchored by a philosophical triad of observation, hypothesis and experimentation. Science is also a process that involves people and is, therefore, influenced by social, political and historical forces that are prevalent at different times. Unfortunately, science is often presented to the general public, and especially to students, as a series of factual statements about the universe without an understanding of the process involved in generating these statements. The teaching of science in high schools is typically driven by a tightly corseted curriculum that is heavy on content and detail, and even if experiments are performed in class, the final approach is limited in its scope to help students to think in science. Teachers are typically caught by constraints of finishing the curriculum on time, and given administrative and results-orientated demands, and thus fail to consider this important aspect of science in approaching lessons. In the end, students largely remain ignorant of the process of science, its historical growth, and the contemporary social, political and philosophical concerns of science. This article describes some attempts at unravelling a few aspects of the philosophical, historical and social facets of science in a combined 11th and 12th grade biology classroom.

The class was about microscopy. The exercise was a comparison of the images under the microscope of normal lung tissue with photographs of lung tissue from a 1918 global flu epidemic. One of the students had a question on the process of preparing slides that had lasted nearly a hundred years and could be examined even today. He also commented that the colours in the photographs of old slides resembled the slides under the microscope in class and asked if the process involved in making the slides was similar. Another student had a question on the process of retrieving organs from dead patients and whether the autopsy required permissions of relatives. Another had concerns about the safety of retrieving the lungs from dead patients and wondered if the patients were infective even after death. Over the next few weeks, the discussions expanded to include other questions. We discussed the hospital and trench conditions in northern France that may have allowed this disease to spread rapidly. We also discussed the rapidity of death, often within three days after the first appearance of symptoms. A comparison of the slides showed physical differences in the condition of the lung tissue that could be linked to the symptoms. We approached the challenges involved in identifying the cause of the severe symptoms, since the influenza virus wasn't identified from human tissue till 1933. How was the flu virus of 1918 different from the one prevalent today, and what made it so deadly?

The background to this exercise was a curricular approach that I had been following for some years now, to anchor a whole year's course around a particular topic. The topic for this year's course was the fascinating but deadly influenza pandemic of 1918 that had killed more people across the world in a span of a few months than both the world wars combined. The potential of the topic to address the curriculum, and in addition, to allow for discussions on the philosophy, history and sociology of science, made it an attractive one for that year's batch of 11th grade biology students. A glimpse of the lab class given above might help the reader with an appreciation of the discussion potential for such a class. The curricular topics that I could cover ranged from physiology—gas exchange, blood, vascular and immune systems to basic cell biology—cell ultrastructure, enzyme kinetics, transport, cell division, and introductory molecular biology. I must note here that for a teacher preparing for such an approach to a course requires a thorough familiarity with the curriculum *and* with the topic at hand which would enable mapping curricular content with ideas central in the topic for discussions and lab work. As the course proceeded, I felt that this approach allowed for a detailed look at the various questions that emerged in relation to the topic, often implicitly conveying or resulting in experiencing the scientific process through practical classes. In these classes, we try to understand science as it unfolds across the world—observations, hypothesis, experiment—and then see if the hypothesis should be rejected or not. We did this in addition to proof-of-principle demonstrations of well-known biological phenomena where the nature of a school lab limits experiments due to questions of scale, equipment, time and cost. At the same time, I felt we needed to get a bigger picture across historical time on a wider range of topics, including contemporary social and ethical questions around science. To address this, I conducted a separate reading and discussion course which explored the philosophy of science, with a focus on biology, for a combined class of 11th and 12th grade biology students.

In this six-month course, we spent one forty-five-minute session every week discussing a reading that I had assigned previously. The readings were largely excerpted from a book, *Thinking about Biology* (Webster 2003), with supple-

mental readings wherever necessary. They spanned a range of topics that were central in shaping modern biology over the past two centuries or so but were chosen in a manner that covered important philosophical questions in biology as well.

One of the first issues that we discussed was looking at the scale of biological systems and processes and the nature of scientific investigation into these scales. In this we discussed the reductionist approach, looking at a system by looking at smaller units within it, which is such an integral part of modern biology especially with the advent of molecular biology over the past sixty-five years, but also dating further back to the invention of microscopy and the opening up of the world of cells and tissues. We also discussed the development of evolutionary thought, involving whole organisms and across generations spanning millennia. The philosophical debate of the reductionist approach and the big picture approach, symbolized by Darwinism, became an important early question that we took up in the course. The processes operating at the spatial-temporal scale of natural selection seemed very different from those operating inside cells and on DNA. But with the basic continuum that exists between these different levels of organization of life, one of the first questions we addressed was looking at examples of where and why micro and macro thinking clashed philosophically, and the possibilities that these clashes be reconciled in some way, especially in modern evolutionary theory. These are fairly big questions that biologists continue to grapple with today, and the students got a glimpse of important questions in debate from the past, and the way they have taken shape today. An important perspective that I aimed to introduce through this discussion was the diversity of approaches to understanding biological systems and processes, and the importance of the scientific approach to debating these questions with rational arguments based on experimental observations.

Another important angle to this course was to attempt an understanding of the interface of science and society, when the prevailing social norms and debates impact science and vice versa. This has become particularly sharp in modern times with the debates around genetically modified crops and the use of embryonic stem cells in research. In both these examples, we looked at a framework of understanding the outstanding points of contention between the scientific findings and questions emerging from society on the ethics of these findings. Is it possible to understand this debate within a rational framework based on some philosophical first principles? What are the elements of such a framework? How do various sources of social questions—religious or secular thinking, democratic and other political processes, and entrenched social hierarchies—contribute to this framework? What aspects of the debate remain outside such of a framework? How does science then accommodate social questions? Aren't scientists full members of society with responsibility to their own work and to society? How do they as individuals reconcile their own belief systems with those of science, and to the questions raised in society? These became important questions for our discussion around this topic. The students eventually hosted a role play debate on the history and ethics of the eugenics movement as a concluding session to this part of the course.

The children participated enthusiastically throughout the course. It did mean extra reading every week, but most of them managed it despite other work pressures including other work from the biology course. It did mean a short class, but the time we had together was intense, and the discussions often became debates with students taking sides. What was impressive was their ability to listen to each other, not remaining settled in entrenched positions, but being able to move ahead while setting aside their favourite ideas. We did have a good laugh on days when we discussed the fiery nature of the public debate on genetically modified crops. One of the students wondered whether the questions that anti-GMO activists or pro-GMO scientists have are very much tied into their identities, whereas for the students perhaps it was more an academic exercise and it didn't have the same significance. And so, we didn't escape the inevitable discussion of the nature of the self which forces us to defend ourselves as individuals on a battlefield while all that we are discussing are ideas. Why should it be so?

In conclusion, I feel that the course attempted to raise questions and to offer glimpses of contemporary historical, social and philosophical questions in biology. It was a long course, and sometimes felt arduous but I hope it left students with questions that they will take forward with them beyond the course, to the realms of interrogating biological systems and the forces beyond the laboratory that shape these questions as well.

Reference

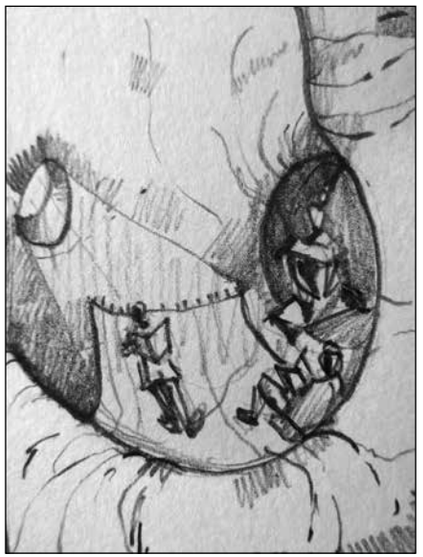
Webster, S. 2003. *Thinking about Biology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

On Re-designing Spaces for Learning

Afshan Mariam

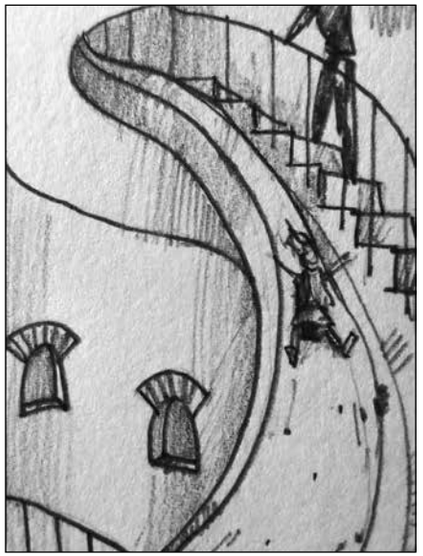
Thirty years ago, when a teacher had started building a school, she received a suggestion from the architect, "Make the windows four feet off the floor so that the children don't look outside". Keeping children inside concrete walls, away from 'distractions', was a common practice.

In recent times, however, educators and architects have been experimenting with spaces differently. Architectural psychology, a relatively new field, has been delving into questions that could throw light on how physical spaces might impact human behaviour, emotions, attitudes and social interactions. Some of the research findings have been implemented in designing more engaging and compassionate spaces for children. For example, a children's hospital in Pittsburgh introduced design features such as softer materials, low-level beds, natural light and a healing garden. These have been found to accelerate recovery and create feelings of emotional and physical well-being among the children and their care-givers.



Spaces, in many ways, facilitate or hinder our interactions with world. Crowded spaces might make us anxious and deter us from engaging with people, whereas a sunlit room can inspire feelings of lightness and joy. This raises quite a few questions in the context of a school—what impact does architecture of a school have on children and educators? Are they truly spaces of learning that foster creativity and curiosity? How would such spaces look?

On a visit to a school in Goa, I was struck by how huge I felt in the space—the archways to the classroom were low, the sinks were just two feet off the ground and slides ran between the floor levels. Every classroom had an outside corner lined with bricks and plants. The nursery section had a doll house—a play area with a kitchenette, dolls and other playthings. I instantly knew that this place belonged to the children. Apart from the delightful corners (the cupboard under the stairs was titled 'H. Potter's Cupboard' and stored sports equipment), the space let in plenty of natural light from whimsically designed skylights and walls lined with glass bottles. This created a sense of space, despite the scaled down furniture and walls.



But it's not only the rooms and furniture that can foster creativity and learning. In Rishi Valley School, the trees on the school campus are as much a part of our 'architecture'. They provide their own benchmarks and sculptural spaces to explore. The freshers are usually introduced to the easy tree—a low lying, heavily branched tree—which even the smallest could climb. Then comes the KBT (Krishnamurti Banyan Tree), a generous banyan tree with roots to swing from, cocooned within a grassy landscape dotted with flycatchers. And later, they can move on to trees that are more challenging to climb.

Contrary to the architect who suggested keeping the outside away from the classroom, bringing nature into the classroom by having larger windows or potted plants has been shown to reduce anxiety among students and encourage a positive learning environment. Letting natural light into a room has been proven to optimally regulate the circadian rhythms in the body, increasing productivity and level of comfort. Of course, the ideas behind these studies are not new. Krishnamurti, Tagore and others have always placed nature at the centre of the learning process. These studies have served the purpose of fine tuning our spaces and building them more consciously. They also throw light on the fact that spaces not only create a culture but also carry ideas from a particular culture. A school that places environmental

consciousness, compassion and relationships at its centre might not limit itself to posters on the wall. The built spaces communicate these abstract ideas in more concrete form.

While more and more learning spaces are trying to include the outdoors within their classroom structure, some have explored this idea in a more radical manner. In a school in Auroville, the township itself has become the classroom. The children meet at a 'basecamp' in the mornings. It is an open space with a wooden shed, kitchen and dining tables. They meet here to do some math or English work in the mornings, grow their food and eat their meals. After this, their 'classes' are held in the homes of the parents who have volunteered to teach them that day. The children walk or cycle within the community, visiting different homes, interacting with the community and learning what different people can offer. This can be as diverse as learning English through baking, learning a recipe and doing worksheets based on the recipe, or visiting a forest community to build a machine that grinds using pedal power, integrating science concepts into the process. Since the resources already existed, it made most sense to use the community as the learning lab rather than simulating it within a closed environment. It also encouraged the children to become more comfortable with the environment around them and gave them a context to interact with people from their community in a meaningful manner.

Another aspect that has its roots in traditional architecture, but has been adapted to educational settings, is interactive architecture. The architecture lends itself to being a living entity. Windows of course let in light, but what about that window with the perfect ledge to read by, or the window that has patterned grills that are perfect for climbing or working out multiplication problems? There have been several such instances where spaces have been made flexible to suit different purposes. While moving desks to facilitate group work and individual work has been the most viable, physical structures have also been morphed to facilitate interactions and solitude. The Cuckoo Forest School in Thiruvannamalai has etched traditional games such as *Pallanghuzhi, Atta Kozhi Attam* and Seven Stones on their porch, encouraging students to play and converse while they sit outside.

A school in Bangladesh, built using local materials such as bamboo and mud, has included a feature where the walls are curved to make little cubby holes. These encourage students to find solitude and quiet within their classroom space.

I have found that such spaces work well when they are clearly demarcated from the classroom spaces. In a school in Ooty, we had a quiet room within the classroom. This room had a small library, cushions, blankets, soft animals and other comforting objects. It allowed natural light to come in and had a most delightful little fireplace that added to its charm and sense of cosiness. When new children came in, they were oriented to the space and the older children would suggest instances of when they could use it. The reasons ranged from being tired, wanting to be alone, writing something, or feeling less angry. We communicated that we trusted the children to use the space when they needed and that they could call for an adult if they needed one. Otherwise, the adults usually did not enter the room when it was being used. As more autonomy is encouraged among learners, such spaces become critical to identifying their needs and styles of working. Over time, the children learned when they needed solitude, how to comfort themselves, and to take responsibility for their emotions.

Keeping these ideas in mind while designing spaces of learning are now very much part of more newly constructed schools. However, before referring to research, the best design consultants are probably children themselves and the architects are listening. A friend who was designing a play-scape for children had a curious way of understanding elements that were important to them. He would ask them to give him directions from where

they were standing to the closest playground. He found that they never used billboards or signboards as landmarks. This is quite logical as most such landmarks are above their eye level. On the other hand, they made some keen observations. The house with the spotted dog in the front or the ripped up tree were some of the descriptions given to him. The world was much more dynamic and alive when it came to them. They were asked to describe their 'dream parks', elements of which were then included in the design. Quirky details and colours, such as an alligator's mouth to enter the tunnel or polka-dotted swings, were some of the recommendations given and these helped him design a wildly popular play-scape for the community.

Our feelings and ideas about spaces are constantly evolving as we continue to engage with them over time. From architecture in schools being designed to monitor and control children, we are moving towards restructuring our spaces in order to encourage creativity, play and joy. As we work alongside children, perhaps breaking down a wall or two might not be such a bad idea after all.

Meeting 'Otherness'

Keerthi Mukunda

The moment Gray Fire stopped I gripped his arm. "Who are they?"

"Strangers," he replied. I had heard that word used before but like many grown up expressions, it didn't mean anything special to me. I thought strangers were some kind of make-believe beings, like the talking animals parents told their children about or the creature who is supposed to be half-fish and half-human.

"Strangers are real?" Even the sound was lumpy on my tongue, as if I had tasted food that was not properly cooked.

"Oh yes. They are like us, but they are not us." Gray Fire answered in a distracted tone.

'Sees Behind Trees' by Michael Dorris
(A Native American story set in north-eastern
United States some few hundred years ago)

How does it even come to be that we consider each other strangers? It appears that the need for belonging is one thing that drives a lot of our actions as human beings, and consequently leads to a *who-is-in* and *who-is-out* movement, a coding and labelling of someone as an outcast, a stranger. This clear boundary defines a *them* and an *us*.

We have drawn social boundaries ever since we inhabited the earth. For thousands of years, our human species has been conditioned to see the 'other' as different from oneself, to separate the *other* as alien, or to see family or tribe as an extension of that same 'oneself'. Maybe this was to protect oneself or one's own group. The form that the *other* has taken has morphed over the millennia, beginning perhaps with another species of humans

(such as the Neanderthals) to another tribe, to another caste, another class, another race, another culture, another sexual orientation, another language, another dialect within the same language…the list can be endless! As Toni Morrison, the American writer says, when discussing race, "Race is the classification of a species, and we are the human race, period. Then what is this other thing—the hostility, the social racism, the othering?"

So, what is this othering? Where is its beginning and where is its end? The movement of 'othering' is the act of seeing another group as having an identity different from one's own, based on, for example, skin colour, class, caste, livelihood, culture, language, background. Such criteria on a group level exist, but, even on an individual level I look with divisiveness, often feeling separated from a friend or family member. Upon my search to unravel these threads, I see a separateness in all my fields of perception.

At school, in a session with eleven-year-olds after a field trip, we came to the question: what makes you feel different from the other person? One of the children blurted out in response, "Basically, someone who is not ME!" Perhaps she had meant, "someone who is not like me". But her simple statement said it all, just like Gray Fire in the Native American context from a few hundred years ago! Feeling *separate* is the point in question. There is also the hyper-need we have to find similarities of culture, appearance, experience and background, which unfortunately overshadow the humanness of being one, being together. At school we nurture a space where children and adults can observe these movements of separation while immersed in the ups and downs of daily life.

Don't we condition our children to see through the lens of *othering*? We label each other based on this lens and then that person does not rise up in our eyes and become more than what we have labelled. So we appear surprised when the label is challenged! Once I tell the story or define the other person or group according to my definition and according to a difference that I seek to see (creating an *image*), it limits who they are and what their multiple narratives might be. The Nigerian author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who uses the term multiple narratives, says in a talk, "There is a 'danger of a single story'; the story of Africa being one of tragedy or poverty, the story of an African American being one of crime. We have this image, this stereotype that is fixed and doesn't allow *multiple narratives* of that person." Or how about allowing no narrative at all; just a perception of a person—without naming and labelling?

When further exploring what this movement of othering involves, we notice that this is an act of measurement. We look at the 'other' being either greater than myself or lesser than myself (Do I enjoy power or experience subordination?) It is an act of qualifying what that person is with regard to my status or position. Depending on that, I either look down on, look up to, respect or disrespect. Action towards the other comes from this definition I have made and qualification I have decided upon. I feel pity, I feel admiration, I might feel disgust, I might feel envy. This act of identification plays out in school, through inclusion or exclusion, and then, associated feelings ensue. Children, like us adults, create cliques or clubs, based on cultural markers such as movies seen, music enjoyed, and even choice of foods!

More acutely in classes, other factors that play out are discriminations based on different abilities. Children often navigate their social realm through measurement. They size each other up. They understand each other through a measure of abilities. However, at school we do not institutionally segregate based on ability or capacity, and we provide many opportunities for shared experience like trips, walks, residential living, dialogues and so on. Given this wide shared experience at school, why does the mind stay small in its perceptions?

Another way we segregate in society is to define the other as *normal* and *not normal*. Are these fixed because of the majority group? The boundary line in this case is being drawn by one group and allows privilege to that group, it seems. The criterion could be sexual orientation for example. With children we talk about the transgender community, whom we meet at traffic lights and tollbooths. What are our reactions and feelings and why? Imagine, we have defined ourselves through sexual orientation and then created the 'other'! By reading groups this way, we dismiss *others*. If we stepped away and perceived the root of this to be a human consciousness issue (and not based on who you are) with a deep conditioning to see separateness, could one peel away many layers of identity to reveal this root, and could strongly held beliefs and feelings, wither away? What would it mean to respond with compassion to *any other* rather than sizing people up based on the mental lists we tuck away?

While we say we need to suspend labels and criteria, it is a fact that we as a school are an affluent space within a vast rural context here on our campus. Yes, we do need to acknowledge the urban lives we have come from, the privileges we have enjoyed, the cultural and monetary spring boards we

take for granted. These impact the way we see those who have come from a different set of conditions, in the wider society here. We might 'read' the other groups as lower class, being deprived of something, struggling, preserving religion and tradition. We create stories here: the story of a lower caste Dalit being downtrodden, the stories of rural India, the story of an Adivasi (tribal) group. We might want to *give* and *do* something for them. In this complex picture, how do we enable students to reveal their prejudices, build a bridge or sharpen their perceptions of the other, and then and only then, formulate action?

One statement we have come across in society and in school is, "I am originally from here" ('Here' being the Indian subcontinent)! We did a middle school social science project with an eighth standard group titled 'Where are you from?' —exploring assumptions about people and place, unpacking our limited pictures of nationality, appearances, race, blood and backgrounds. We asked questions of the children to check assumptions (What does an Indian look like? Where is home for you?), and then we would interview and meet people whose lives had taken them through different spaces, countries and experiences and hence blurred the lines of nationality, belonging and homeland. Blurring the lines was uncomfortable for some of the children who wanted certainty and identity fixed! At one point we looked at a documentary about DNA evidence showing the movement of early humans through continents—Africa, Asia, Australia, etc. We as a species have been moving, settling, moving, settling and moving again. The notion that only some people in India are *meant* to be here as this is their homeland, was exploded. There were no privileges based on blood type or race since you were informed that you could check your DNA and trace which group of wandering human beings you had descended from!

Our social studies projects in the middle school are an attempt to provide a balanced picture for the children, by integrating lots of outside trips, talking with people, relating and building relationships, and unpacking assumptions and prejudices. The aim of this curriculum is to connect with the world around, local and global; to nurture a sensitivity towards people we are less familiar with; to develop critical thinking skills and an ability to express the basis of our opinions, thoughts and understanding. In our approach, we value the learning that grows from contact with people and places, learning based on our own encounters and processing. In

a similar vein, we have valued working with primary material, and with multiple sources or voices of a particular time.

We want to question narrativizing itself, the process of creating a story of the other or oneself for that matter, the movement of the mind to see divisiveness and separation even in the smallest of groups. In questioning and exploring, we are wary of a sensitization process for children, where we help them tolerate others, one group at a time, so that they become sensitive to all. Rather we throw light on the framework in the mind where the separateness begins, where the lens is formed and where the act of *othering* springs from. Tolerance Education, as it is sometimes called, runs the risk of still labelling and the questions might arise: Tolerance to whom? Based on what descriptions? If we nurture care and compassion without measurement can there be an insight where *othering* ends?

Kite-Flying for Beginners

Dialogue in our schools and centres

Stephen Smith

We are familiar with dialogue in film scripts and novels where it means, simply, a conversational exchange—one person speaks, the other responds. It began, probably, with the dawn of language itself. Only later, with the ancient Hindus and the Greeks, did it acquire the sense of a discourse pursued with the clear intention of arriving at truth. Though there is little doubt that Socrates 'knows', it is the way of discovery that is important; it is by the discarding of false ideas that one arrives finally at the truth. Coherent, rational thinking is central to it.

We live in a time shot through with information; indeed, it is often called the Information Age. And, though it is still in its infancy, it promises to be as far-reaching a development as were the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions. It is remodelling how we see ourselves, developing our potential in new and different ways and presaging, some say, a new Golden Age. Unfortunately, it does not—indeed, it cannot—say anything to us about the meaning of life. Whatever evidence there is, on the contrary, suggests that the avalanche of information is as likely to bury as it is to redeem us. The 'ancient question' still remains—what is meaning, and where can we find it? It is to this need/ question that dialogue responds.

At the beginning of his mature life's work, in the speech he gave at Ommen (Holland) in 1929, Krishnamurti declared that his sole aim was, "to set men totally, unconditionally, free". He pursued this aim for the rest of his life. It is significant in the context we are exploring because he also often said, it is the truth that sets us free, not our attempts to capture it. It takes what he called a 'passive alertness', a receptivity to the 'New', which he equates at the same time with listening and learning. For these are present-tense activities which stem from, and inhere in, the movement of attention. And, while the latter cannot be predicated, nor can it be said to exist *a priori*, it is by its very nature comprehensive and precise. One knows it by *being* it, being part of it.

The same holds true for dialogue. In dialogue what we bring to the table is not first and foremost our knowledge and experience, but an unforced quality of listening attention—we are willing to make space for whatever may come up. Apparently innocuous, this is the vital first step since it opens the field to something 'greater', more significant, than the back-and-forth of discussion, debate and dialectic. This 'something' cannot be known in advance; indeed, to speak truly, it cannot be *known* at all. But it can be sensed, felt, intuited, 'known without knowing'—the access to it is via a different door. The poor village boy on a bluff above the Ganga releases his home-made kite to the breeze.

Dialogue groups vary in size, age and composition, but the thread of listening unites them all. For listening is a quality both of heart and mind. In a sense, it has no resting place; it is as open as the sky, and as unpredictable. Also, like the sky, it has no end. I am listening not just to the literal meaning, but to the tone of voice, the 'resonance' of the speaker, and implied in that listening is an unfettered willingness to receive what is said without barriers or reaction. It is this alignment/attunement that is important, not the ideational content of what is being said, for it is at this moment that we leave behind the divisive, often confrontational, exchange of thought for the deeper waters of communion. There is a felt shift, a 'change of heart'. Or, perhaps it is simply that the heart takes its place—not the heart of emotion and reaction, but the subtle sense of wholeness, of oneness—that truth does not lie in the ideational, but in the shift to a deeper level of being.

This deeper level has its own radiance, its own unborrowed light; we may call it *intelligence*. It arises in a group when the separative self, which is the outcome of thought, becomes aware of itself—sufficiently, at least, for it to be temporarily suspended. There is a diminution of its controlling grip—without, incidentally, any loss of acuity—a sense that what looks continuous, the 'I', is not the impenetrable wall it seems but is, in fact, discontinuous. It is in the gap that communion takes place. By its very nature it is untenanted: it is the free and open space waiting to be filled. Or, rather, not *filled* exactly—more inhabited, played in, enjoyed. The breeze catches the kite. It is moving now, though held.

What is the need for, the *raison d'etre* of, dialogue? In a strict sense, it has no purpose;, like life itself, it is its own reason for being. Nevertheless, we restrict ourselves greatly if our lives are so dense with experience and information that we make no room for 'something else' to enter, that something which, as K says, "man has always sought". We sense it at first

perhaps vaguely, ill-definedly, then it becomes of compelling importance. At the same time, it takes shape in us; it becomes the nature, the substance, of who we really are. So, to put it bluntly, we are dumbing ourselves down if we restrict ourselves to the level plane of action laid out for us by modern materialistic society. This includes the latest wave of technological invention as it does the pursuit of self-advancement, the narcissistic craving to be seen and recognised.

The 'something else' we seek is not far away; indeed, it is exactly and precisely where we are. It is at the core of our daily lives. It is in this sense that dialogue creates the opportunity to explore the immediate *what is* of existence. *What is* may be the ultimate truth; it may also be the truth of our own conflicted lives. And the relevance of it may pertinently lie in the direct exposure of the nature of such conflict—impersonally, because it is common to us all. And the commonality of consciousness implies not only that we share the same content, as we share our DNA, but that the way into the unravelling of this content lies in observation of the common pool. We are not *in-dividuals (= un-divided)*, whatever we may think, and our 'salvation' does not lie within the pursuit of this illusion, but in the seeing that consciousness really *is* common and that we are part of the stream; it is our inheritance. In this sense, truly, I am 'my brother's keeper'.

In this sense also—naturally, easily—a sense of affection should pervade the group. Once it is understood that point-scoring is not the object and that individualistic competition injures all the competitors, winners and losers alike, there is again room for that space to emerge wherein true learning-in-attention can take place. Unlike book learning, it is non-accumulative; indeed, it is unrepeatable. We are speaking psychologically, of course. We all need to be aware of the world we are living in, but self-knowledge, or self-knowing, is of a different kind. For, while we may by reflection and analysis put aside the blocks to the awakening of intelligence, this alone will not bring it about. The kite is hovering, thirty feet above the ground. What shall we do? Wait for it to fall? This is the moment of suspension, the moment of non-action, the empty atom. If we fill it with the known, we are back where we were; if we strain to go beyond it, similarly so. Can we simply sit and wait? It is an arduous task, one that the brain is quite unused to. It is used to the forward movement of time; in fact, that movement *is* thought-time. And anything it projects is still tied to time; therefore, it is never original. Originality does not lie in the promptings of thought, however high-flown, far-reaching and inventive. It lies in the nuanced in-between,

the abeyance, but not the control, of thought. Originality flows *from its own ground*, once the way to that ground is unimpeded. The 'I' as the doer, the agitator, the mover cedes his central place; he ceases to exist. It is at this moment that intelligence may enter, quicker than lightning and equally destructive. It is death to the time-worn trammels of thought. The kite takes a nosedive but soars up again.

We have touched something now—it is a new equation. Whatever the topic—love, death, relationship—we are launched, in touch with the actuality of it, not merely with the verbal cipher. In other words, we are looking at the moon and not at the finger which points to it. A subtlety has entered our field of perception, and with that perception we can travel far. At the same time, it is nothing abstruse, nothing mystical or requiring explanation. It is the simplest, most commonplace thing on earth, available to all, anywhere, any time. For it unites the *what is* of ultimate truth with the equal *what is* of daily life and, indeed, reveals them to be one and the same. There is no work too grand, no task too humble. This is Krishnamurti's legacy.

What is required of us is implementation, a fearless setting forth, an *application*. No kite-flying manual can teach us what to do, for the stuff of its building is our own. And the making of it is its own goal, the flying of it its own transcendence. From first to last it was meant to fly.

Poetry as a Portal

Karen Hesli

For days I had been rummaging around in old poetry files; so granted, I was warmed up from reminiscing with old favourites, when a cherished magazine, *Rethinking Schools* (Summer 2010) surfaced. The cover enticed me with the colourful graphic, 'The Power of Poetry', and within minutes I found myself brought to tears reading students' poems. They had been given the prompt of Raymond Carver's poem 'Fear' and they opened windows wide into their private lives of raw fear, which melted my heart, along with theirs. Feelings of empathy for these students' lives propelled me from writing this essay *about* poetry into actually being *transported into their suffering*, so I have rewritten this introductory paragraph to underscore that poetry is indeed a portal to connect with fellow humans.

The power of poetry

Yes, poetry has power. It can unleash awareness at all levels. This potential—that poetry provides the opportunity to express ourselves artfully and truthfully and that this expression may connect universes—is unequivocal. Thanks to the popularization of rap music, spoken word festivals and poetry slams throughout the world, poetry has enjoyed resurgence in schools, colleges and among the teens and young adult societies.

Through poetry, students are excavating the elemental depths of human understanding and their spoken words have become springboards for transformative action and political and social awareness. No matter what the topic, reading or writing a poem unearths our common ground on the planet and bears witness to the unitive potential.

Krishnamurti suggests that the whole of life is learning and he invited teachers and students to explore the ordinary workings of the human mind as well as its deeper layers. For me, reading and writing poetry are vehicles for identifying what is happening within us, including the controlling, dismissing, or judging noise of thinking. Poetry can reach within us in ways that other modes of expression may not, and hence, its great value for educators.

The list of what poetry can do is endless; it touches on …everything, including nothing… and all the in-betweenness of things. The right poem at the right moment can exercise the heart and mind in unforeseen ways. A poem can be a bridge or a path, a wake-up call or a ceremony, a cry for help or a dance around a fire. Poems excavate, distil, catalyze and create pause.

For a second, a poem may span the millennia. Poems you have loved for a lifetime and passed on to others hold the pulse of infinity. I would like to pass these poems on to you, hoping they may take on a life and path of their own into other worlds of inquiry and artistic expression. In this essay I include some poems that I have shared with teachers and students in circles of inquiry and reflection. I have chosen some of these poems because they refer to the life of schools, and others because they are like a good hike up a mountain with a friend. I have excerpted here a few lines from each of these poems, and the complete poem can be read on the website indicated in the end-notes. The shorter poems are reproduced complete.

Some of these poems point to the fragmentary nature of the bits of knowledge we accumulate without being able to consider the 'wholeness of life'. Emotions too gather around these disjointed bits and pieces, even as we may remain unaware of them. The first poem, 'Fear', mentioned below, was the jumping off point for high school students in Chicago to describe their own challenges, especially of living with the fear of racism.

Fear[1]

Raymond Carver

Fear of seeing a police car pull into the drive. Fear of falling asleep at night.

Fear of not falling asleep. Fear of the past rising up.

Fear of the present taking flight. Fear of the telephone that rings in the dead of night.

Fear of electrical storms. Fear of the cleaning woman who has a spot on her cheek!

Fear of dogs I've been told won't bite. Fear of anxiety!

Fear of having to identify the body of a dead friend. Fear of running out of money.

…

Conditioning

A cornerstone of Krishnamurti's educational intent is to understand the nature of human conditioning. So I think our first order of business as

educators is to take full stock of the fact that the seeds of current problems are sown in schools. We see how school environments and teachers unwittingly and wittingly condition our minds and hearts from decades of enforced machine-like conformity. Krishnamurti suggests that many memories are lodged unnecessarily, habitually, and as such they have come to dominate the mind and clog our creativity. We are conditioned to absorb and value knowledge and to think that knowledge will solve our problems, to which Krishnamurti says, "something essential has evaded us". The extracts from the two poems that follow bring this 'something' into focus:

You Reading This, Be Ready[2]

William Stafford

Starting here, what do you want to remember?
How sunlight creeps along a shining floor?
What scent of old wood hovers,
What softened sound from outside fills the air?
…

On Turning Ten[3]

Billy Collins

The whole idea of it makes me feel
Like I'm coming down with something
…
It seems only yesterday I used to believe
there was nothing under my skin but light.
If you cut me I would shine
But now when I fall on the sidewalk
I skin my knees and bleed.

Knowledge and the unknown

That we are 'embalmed in prejudices', as Krishnamurti has said, speaks to knowledge and thinking held in wrong places. Recurring human problems of conflict, war and exploitation are examples of the myopia of conditioning. As Krishnamurti says, "…there is obviously something radically wrong with the way we bring up our children. I think most of us are aware of this but we do not know how to deal with it… The individual is of first importance, not the system. To understand life is to understand ourselves. That is both the beginning and end of education."

We have seen that our time in school is lopsided, a one-sided affair, with the pre-dominance of fragmented knowledge. The unknown is where young children live, and teachers and parents spend precious time organizing the sense of wonder and curiosity into the adult world of knowledge, of naming flowers and birds instead of looking at them. To enter the world of wonder, of questioning, to refrain from answering, to dwell within the beauty of the unknown, to say 'I don't know' and mean it, or 'what does it matter?' is to respect and honour children's world of magic.

The following excerpt and three poems invite inquiry into the limits of knowledge, the joy of daily work done well, the deeper conflicts of our times, and the mystery at the heart of human nature.

First Reader[4]

Billy Collins

…
Now it was time to discover the infinite clicking
Permutation of the alphabet's small and capital letters
Alphabetical ourselves, in the rows of classroom desks
We were forgetting how to look,
We were learning how to read.

To Be of Use[5]

Marge Piercy

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
…
But the thing worth doing well done has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil
Hopi vases that held corn, these are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

To Those Born Later[6]

Bertolt Brecht

I
Truly I live in dark times
The guileless word is folly
A smooth forehead
Suggests insensitivity. The man who laughs
Has simply not yet had
The terrible news.
…
I would also like to be wise,
In the old book it says what wisdom is
To shun the strife of the world and to live out
Your brief time without fear

Also to get along without violence
And to return good for evil
Not to fulfill your desires but to forget them, is wise.
All this I cannot do
Truly I live in dark times.

Two Kinds of Intelligence

Jellaludin Rumi

There are two kinds of intelligence; one acquired,
As a child in school memorizes facts and concepts
From books and from what the teacher says
Collecting information from the traditional sciences
As well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world.
You get ranked ahead or behind others
with regard to your competence in retaining information.
With this intelligence you stroll
In and out of fields of knowledge,
Getting more marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet
One already completed and preserved inside you.
A spring overflowing its springbox.
A freshness in the center of the chest
This intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate.
It's fluid and it doesn't move from
Outside to inside through
Conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead
From within you, moving out.

Responsibility and wholeness

As educators, what is our responsibility? Krishnamurti observes, "When one travels around the world, one notices to what an extraordinary degree human nature is the same, whether in India or America, in Europe or Australia. We are turning out, as if through a mould, a type of human being whose chief interest is to find security, to become somebody important, or to have a good time with as little thought as possible." Millions of people across the globe gather to celebrate, to pray, to learn, to improve themselves, to create something new; but is this newness really new? Teachers and parents are fundamentally responsible for the state of the world, for it is the children growing from our families and schools that create and perpetuate our culture and society. So we must ask ourselves, "what does it mean to be human?", and yearn for conversations that make deep abiding impact into our understanding of how we got to where we are, and where we might be going. To enter the realm of wondering about life is fundamental to good health in its deepest sense. The following two poems inspire that kind of reflection and conversation. They provoke the reader to ask, 'what is truly new", "what is whole" and what is it that prevents this from coming into being?

Love in the Classroom[7]

— for my students

Al Zolynas

Afternoon.
Across the garden in Green Hall
Someone begins playing the old piano—
A spontaneous piece, amateurish and alive
Full of simple joyful melody.
The music floats among us in the classroom.
I stand in front of my students

telling them about sentence fragments.
I ask them to find the ten fragments
in the twenty-one-sentence paragraph on page forty-five.
…
I sit down on my desk to wait,
and it hits me from nowhere—a sudden
sweet, almost painful love for my students.
"Nevermind," I want to cry out.
"It doesn't matter about fragments.
Finding them or not. Everything is a fragment
and everything's not a fragment.
Listen to the music, how fragmented, how whole.
We can't separate it from the sun falling on its knees
out our window,
Or from this moment.
This moment contains all the fragments
Of yesterday and everything we'll ever know of tomorrow.
…

I Believe in all That Has Never Yet Been Spoken

Rainer Maria Rilke

I believe in all that has never yet been spoken
I want to free what waits within me
So that what no one has dared to wish for
May for once spring clear
Without my contriving.
If this is arrogant, god forgive me,
But this is what I need to say.
May what I do flow from me like a river
No forcing and no holding back,

The way it is with children.
Then in these swelling and ebbing currents
These deepening tides moving out, returning,
Will sing to you as no one ever has,
Streaming though widening channels
Into the open sea.

Love of nature

The earth is facing an unprecedented environmental crisis. Attempts to alleviate deforestation, soil erosion, water and air pollution, without fundamentally understanding the mind and psyche of humankind, without unearthing our assumptions and values, is to perpetuate the heaping of fragmentary and superficial solutions upon each other.

All education should be environmental education—acoustic ecology, deep time ecology, applied ecology, human ecology. What would it take to create an achievable vision of civilization and wilderness coexisting, a sustainable human society where the whole of life is respected and considered?

What is the root of the human problem? Have we asked this question of ourselves, our family members, students or colleagues? Krishnamurti suggests:

> The difficulty in all these human questions is that we have become so utterly weary and hopeless, altogether confused and without peace; life weighs heavily upon us and we want to be comforted, we want to be loved. Being insufficient within ourselves, how can we hope to give the right kind of education to the child?...That is why the major problem is not the pupil, but the educator; our hearts and minds must be clear if we are to be capable of educating others. We are not machines to be understood and repaired by experts; we are the result of a long series of influences and accidents, and each one has to unravel and understand for himself the confusion of his own nature.
>
> Chapter 7, *Education and the Significance of Life*

These two pieces, excerpts from May Sarton's 'Now I Become Myself' and Wendell Berry's 'The Peace of Wild Things', are offered as an invitation to reflect on a way to live in this world.

Now I Become Myself[8]

May Sarton

Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places
I have been dissolved again and again
Shaken, worn other people's faces
…
As slowly as the ripening fruit
Fertile detached, hanging ready to drop
It falls, but does not exhaust the root.
…

The Peace of Wild Things[9]

Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
And I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life
and my children's lives may be.
…
I come into the presence of still water.
And above me the day-blind stars
Wait with their light.
For a time I rest in the grace of the world,
And be free

Vocation

Finally, I will admit to being an evangelist for poetry. I see poetry as essential equipment for life, and the right poem can open a door, bridge several worlds, speak the truth or inspire truth to be spoken. As Jean Cocteau said, "poetry is useless but indispensable."

The place where one's personal deep gladness, passion and voice meet the world's deep need is a gift of vocation, of right livelihood. To encompass both personal meaning and the common good in one's life is to be a 'blessing to the world'. Krishnamurti has suggested just this possibility for our students. A poem can interrupt the entrenched, rushed mindset, and when Mary Oliver says that when you "step inside a poem you may become cooled and refreshed, less yourself than part of everything", she knows what she's talking about.

Perhaps these last three excerpts will help us go further into the heart of the matter, ask "what is loved and cherished?", and evoke the challenges of living in the world.

Wild Geese[10]

Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good
you do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting
you only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
…

The Sense of Wonder[11]

Rachel Carson

A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful,
full of wonder and excitement.
It is our misfortune that for most of us
that clear-eyed vision,
that true instinct for what is beautiful
and awe-inspiring is dimmed
and even lost before we reach adulthood….
I should ask that my gift to each child in the world

be a sense of wonder so indestructible
that it would last throughout life…'

Untimely Meditations
Nietzsche
…
What have you truly loved up to now;
what has drawn your soul aloft;
what has mastered it and
at the same time blessed it.
Tunnel into yourself and
force your way down
into the shaft of your being.

…

Endnotes

1. http://raymondcarver101.blogspot.com/
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4. www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=37393
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Haiku

K Ramesh

Soap bubbles
From a children's park
break a traffic rule

a surprise-
the little girl
opens her hand…a shell

no breeze-
children on branches
sway their legs

dim light in the bus…
a tiny finger
counts the stars

kindergarten
all in a row
small sandals

her crayons…
the red one smaller
the others

rural school…
the shy smiles of children
waiting for the bus

boy's dorm
the glow of a firefly
in a bottle

carnival over…
a little girl's sandal
among footprints

boy's mouth open
watching the fish
eat the puffed rice

City Life

O R Rao

Chaos

On our street's garbage heap
A child's tattered open notebook
Marked in red 4/10 Belw Avg

Young couple on two wheeler
Wife on pillion, infant on lap
Curly tiny fingers, curly tiny toes
Pink palms, pink soles
Tender body, tiny brain
Face muffled by mother from the urban monoxides
Fate in the claws of the Sphinx
That decrees and decides

Traffic lights…beggar woman approaching, bent
Only 500s in the wallet...too much
She approaches nearer…
Still Red. ...avoid eye contact
Green at last! Get away!
Giant billboard ahead. Misty hills waterfalls and lake
Stay at GetAway Resorts @ Ooty Shimla Darjeeling Kodai All India
At only Rs 9999 a night
Could plan this summer. Ask her tonight.
Fourth gear, Zoom
Get away!

Busy road, ill-lit pavement
Black object in the middle distance
A bundle of rags or a tired street dog?
But nearer, it stirs.
It is neither!
A man in foetus position!
The momentary illusion dissolved.
And this is no rag -bundle or dog at all!
Elephantiasis foot.
No illusion at all!
Merely an obstacle to skirt or step over quick
On the way to the organic and health food store

Lined along the city streets
These great trees
March like an antediluvian army
Through the urban smoke and grime
Captives like us but nobler far than we
In giant pain they await our common doom

Survival

Dusk settles on the cityscape.
Storm clouds are gathering.
I watch from the terrace of my apartment complex.
One by one the lights go up in ten thousand high rise windows
The storm wind gathers itself up
And blows blistering though the high- rises
As through a valley.
A crow tossed and thrown about in the wind
Finds a perch on a high window sill.
With feathers ruffled but spirits unperturbed
Calmly he looks around
For a safer lodging for the night
He is the great survivor unsurpassed
Indomitable and undefeated to the last.

Peace

My newly made friend, the neighbour's mango tree
Is within arm's reach from my balcony
In peace and silence I enjoy his friendly company.
His mistress our neighbour sends a gift
Of a basketful of mangoes, his bounty.
But I really prefer his original gift
Of peace, friendship and quiet company.

Teacher

Siddhartha Menon

I Filing

Following the leader: me. No gaps!
Suppressed giggles; a survey finds
that they are all there, expectant, behind,
deadly serious about this game.

How strong is the thread that keeps them filing,
or lightly meandering adrift?
What spell is this? What if I left,
piping, with them in tow for good?

II Proud moment

Why, when I saw them dance,
coupled rows
of would-be harvesters
in artificial light,

why - even though I
had nothing to do with the way they flung
in easy time
their adult dresses about so merrily -

was there this twinge
as if their dance
were mine?

At what
did this rosy-cheeked
make-believe tug?

III Herald

Why you not teach us?
Summoned thus,
I joined him on the porch.
His question was a starter, not a plea.
Come to my group, I said,
and I'll teach…we'll learn, together.
He was in a smart, red tracksuit top
and thin, colourful shorts,
beneath which the knobbly knees were dry.
Aren't you cold, I asked,
wear your trousers (I knew
he had a brown pair).
Not cold, he said, with a hint of a shiver.
Let's go and see what colour the river is now,
I suggested, winding my muffler firmly.
Twenty steps to the fence,
hand in chilly hand -
we verified it was a kind of deep green.
Near river there is cold,
he pronounced. We watched the quick flow.
He told me, unasked, a word for the froth.
Sea has white like that,
he commented. I was surprised:
have you been to the sea?

My father go, I also.
Where was that, I asked.
Two years back.
Yes, but where?
It…he paused, frowning.
Somewhere far, I ventured.
He nodded, but soon
gave up the struggle for a name.
Sun will coming, he said
comfortingly, pointing to the halo
behind the mountain's crest.
And he was off.

IV Spectators

Fingers crept into mine.
Bulging in his new, yellow t-shirt
the smallest on that scantily grassed field,
his eyes anxious, wide
as he strained to be heard above a gritty microphone,
demanded sustenance,
while the doe-eyed one in an orange dress,
her pony-tail now at rest,
stated wonderingly that he'd consumed
all the water in her small, pink bottle.

V My time

They won't release me - these twittering ones -
as we come to a rest, to spot out the whistlers
that nest against the rim. With one on each side,
I ponder the greenish swill far below.

I urge them to gaze at the dense mountains. I show
profound shadows settling, and mildly chide
their inattention to the way the bristling
upper forests are gutted by the sun.

Urges differ. You cannot divert fledglings
with food for thought. Something's for me to shed.
Now, with timid persistence, they wish me to go,
once and for all, away from a leading edge.
Nor am I reluctant to be so led -
my time this evening is theirs, as they know.

****

So far so good

Together, they've come to confess
they are in love. In love
but the phrase is taboo, so I

put them at ease with a smile
and indicate I've seen
what's running through their minds.

That helps: they settle into
their chairs and seem relieved
that nothing need be stated.

The issue is this… they listen.
My conversational manner
suits the occasion, and they

are demure. So far so good.

We are complicit, ignore
that the thing between us is hard
to reconcile, a current

that bursts its banks where I
conjure sylvan waters
and play the role of a heedful

elephant that serves
in the taming of the wild
between seasons of musth.

Just now we smile, I'll offer
tea. The evening sun
is flooding the lightly cobwebbed

mesh: so far so good.

An Apology to X,Y and Zee

Jeff Welch

My generation was born of a terrible war
Ended by bombs never imagined before
Mothers lost children, husbands and brothers
The ones that returned were no longer sweet lovers
Yet the same education that led us to war
Continued - amazingly - just as before
Rewards and punishments stayed in the schools
Producing new soldiers who'd obey all the rules.

Then by the millions, my peers revolted
And back to the land and the communes they bolted.
Love and peace were the slogans of millions of hippies
Refusing a life confined to the cities.
Refusing later to respond to the Vietnam draft
By leaving the country by stealth or by craft
Where they home-schooled their children as best as they could
Living simply, they learned to carry water, chop wood.

Soon, sharing these tasks had seemed like hard work
And some would rise to it; others would shirk.
Many of the hippies began to lose heart
As politics and pettiness tore their communes apart.
We had given in, failed, that much we knew
Then crept back to the jobs that we'd been trained to do.

We'd had no tools for conflict, just like before
Thus prepared the ground for the next bloody war.

The movement itself though was an education
It taught us that we weren't the greatest of nations
And that *our* religion was no better than yours
And other wrong thinking that causes our wars.
We discovered that wars could not be enacted
If we raised free-thinking children who'd refuse to be drafted
We studied the truths that our gurus unfurled
And set out to enlighten our children's new world.

So here i now come to my apology to you
We weren't very clear on what we had to do.
We created new schools as we had done before
Though our grass seemed much greener and purple the door.
We still didn't get what our egos were doing
Our selfishness bringing the planet to ruin
By depleting the bounty of the many resources
Huge houses and cars and meals of four courses.

Yes, we struggled for years to refine fancy intents
And still we compromised, to pay all the rents
We spent years dialoguing - so much to discuss
To discover the myriad problems were us!
It was hard when we thought all paths had to be tossed
With nothing to guide us, we often were lost
We studied the teachings, but with no one to follow
And truths in a book can ring awfully hollow.

So as we pass on the baton, reflect what we've done
More wars have been fought; still no-one has won
We taught you about conflict, how to argue, to fight
Without physical violence; to be right without might
With small classes in nature and teachers who care
Who tried to be open and honest and fair
While government schools went for high SAT scores
While telling the students it's fine to fight wars.

We were given the task to set you children free
To erase the conditioning so that you're able to see
That we all are interconnected both near and afar
That if we step on a flower, we trouble a star.
Yes we tried to be honest; tried to be fair
Making great efforts - trying to be more aware
Which is just more promotion of a separate you
An illusion trying (effortlessly?) to believe that it's true!

Yes we've left you a mess; that much can be said
Have we given you insights with which you'll be led?
To fix the damage to earth, we need something new
Something *without* the taint of the 'you'
(I so wish i could end with great things you can do
But that might come from *my* taintedness too).
So forgive us, *our* education was riddled with trauma
We pray *you* can break out of this cycle of karma.

Thinking for Oneself

A theme meeting

Renu Galada

Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think.

John Stuart Mill

Background

As children grow into their teens, their minds are fast developing in the intellectual space. As part of their increasing need for autonomy, they want to take decisions and do things on their own; discover their strengths; work over their likes and dislikes; and understand the complexities in societies. They often resist parental intervention and prefer to take charge of themselves. At this age they are pulled in many directions—on the one hand they want to be very individualistic and prefer to be left on their own; on the other hand, they share a strong bond with their peers and veer towards group identity. They sometimes compromise on their choices merely for the sake of consensus or fitting in. They are under pressure to keep up with 'the latest' in clothes, music and the 'cool' trends set by the media. There is not only the growing influence of peers, but there is also the impact of fast media and the ever-growing internet with its tentacles spreading into the lives of both children and adults in equal measure. Marketing companies create ads that drive consumer behaviour and fuels herd mentality. Amidst these influences and pressures, it can indeed be difficult to know when one is thinking on one's own.

Teachers teaching this age group often come across situations of hurt born out of group dynamics; or actions wrought by stereotypical thinking; or trends dictated by herd mentality. How should they respond to these? How should they help children examine the drawbacks of wanting to be

a part of the crowd? How does one help them recognize these influences and pressures? Further, not all outside influences are bad or detrimental in shaping one's views but being unable to think for oneself can make one miserable or a puppet of someone else's machinations. It may be too late before they realize the truth. So, how does one help children to think for themselves? Needless to say, adults too could be equally blind to these influences that shape their thinking. Is it possible for us to take a pause, slow down and allow ourselves a careful exploration of what it means to 'think for oneself'?

A 'theme meeting' that we conducted for classes eight, nine and ten gave us an opportunity for this exploration. Both teachers and parents are responsible for a child. This meeting offered a space to learn and explore aspects of a child's growth together.

The theme meeting

A large number of parents (of classes eight, nine and ten) and teachers came together for over three hours on a Saturday in August this year. The format of the meeting used a combination of video talk, presentations and discussions, to examine this issue in depth.

'The Danger of a Single Story'

We watched the video of this TED talk by the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche. It highlighted how, as humans, we tend to hold on to a single story that gets popularized by powerful voices. Holding on to a single story prevents any kind of relationship on an equal footing. The forming of stereotypes is the forming of a single story. The problem is not that stereotypes are not true, but that they are not complete. They make one story become the only story.

Small group discussions

We collated eight situations from our everyday experiences as teachers of this age group which included herd mentality, inclusion/exclusion, unmindful group behaviour, peer pressure, media influence, etc. Parents and teachers sat in small groups examining these situations, raising questions in order to bring better understanding without taking recourse to labelling or moralizing. It is an important challenge we all face as adults. This exercise enriched our understanding with different viewpoints.

An example of one such situation is illustrated below:

A girl enters the classroom and is met by classmates who are excitedly discussing something. Curious to know what they are talking about, the girl

asks them, "What's up?" The classmates name a TV series that all of them are following these days on Netflix. This girl does not have access to Netflix and does not particularly follow any TV series. She is at a loss to respond to this topic. Her classmates laugh and tell her that she is not up to date on things since she does not watch this series and has no information about it. The girl feels left out when the group moves on to the other end of the classroom to continue their animated conversation without her.

Questions

1. Without labelling their actions as right or wrong, discuss whether or not the children involved in the situation were thinking for themselves.
2. What were the influences at work for each of the students?
3. Is it specific to a child or the age group?
4. In what other ways would such influences impact the students? Are there ways to recognize it?
5. How challenging is it for a child of this age group to think differently in the given situation?
6. How do we enable a child to develop a sense of quietening and empathy in all contexts and not just in their area of interest?

'How Social Media Ruins your Life'

We watched another video, this one by a tech expert Jaron Lanier, to understand the impact of social media on our thinking.

It highlighted the addictive and manipulative nature of social media. The problem is in the business model where the customer is not the final user, but it is the consumer companies advertising on social media. Data about the users gets shared very easily with these companies without any respect for users' privacy. Some of the best brains work here and use well established behavioural research techniques that attempt to manipulate and modify user's behaviour. These techniques are often invisible to users. It made us realize that we may almost be living a life designed for us, that we are getting homogenized and how dangerous this could be for a society, where individuals are robbed of their free will, blocking any avenues to develop multiple perspectives. Given the addictive and manipulating nature of social media, which has become a big part of both children and adult's life, how can one be helped?

Towards the end of the video, when asked for advice, Jaron Lanier recommends youth to stay away from social media for six months. He advises them to travel, know themselves, do different things and develop a perspective instead. He finally makes an important point, that as long as we can have small percentage of individuals outside of this loop, societies will find voices to get multiple perspectives.

'Importance of Thinking Holistically'

We had a final presentation by a colleague on this theme. It started by exploring the questions—What is the role of questioning? Is it merely an employment of one's intellect? A masterful application of a learnt technique? A clever, logical argument crafted to prove a point? What kind of thinking would we like to see in our children? What is 'good thinking'?

Good thinking surely is about exploring dimensions of thinking which go beyond the intellect. Could it embrace dimensions of uncertainty, vulnerability, questions of moral and ethical rightness, issues of sensitivity and compassion for the other? Zen believes that the intellect has a particularly disquieting quality in it. The intellect can raise enough questions to disturb the mind, but it is also frequently unable to give satisfactory answers.

Much of our modern education values how intelligently a student can criticize and counter an argument, which in turn has unsurprisingly found its way into the larger canvas of adult life. Have we endorsed a culture of criticism in which merit is assigned to those who can intelligently negate an idea, a work of art, or increasingly and alarmingly, a person? It seems vital that we need to work with ourselves and our children to learn how to think 'wholly' and 'authentically' for ourselves.

Large group discussion

This session brought to the fore certain pushes and pulls of the fast-paced competitive life of today. Questions from parents came almost promptly. Do we really have time for all these reflections? How practical is slowing down and giving a chance to others?

It raised an important question for us as to what we really want out of our life. Socrates (469–399 BC) had observed of his time, "…the children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room". The expression of alarm over the

ways of the young is certainly nothing new. The quote shows that the problems between generations are not just a recent occurrence. They are timeless. Where and how do we draw our lines?

Recollecting what Krishnaji said, "So what is right education? Is it not both the cultivation of a brain that can function excellently in the world and also psychologically understand the whole meaning of existence, the self, the I, the psyche? Couldn't these two go together—like two well trained horses trotting along harmoniously together—you understand my question? And apparently one horse is highly developed, the other is still a baby, a foal".

One has to traverse through stereotypical thinking fuelled by a single story, understanding the various influences which cripple thinking, recognizing what is happening to us when we are using social media and the importance of developing various points of views, examining the disquieting nature of mind and limitation of intellect, and finally making connection with our daily living through the questions raised. It was a meaningful exercise done in a leisurely manner which helped to bring about a better understanding of our role in Krishnamurti schools, both as teachers and as parents.

Technology and the Classroom*

A wider perspective

R Ramanujam

Science *under* the internet

Some years ago, a couple of girls studying in class 10 approached me wanting to do a project in science. They were very excited about the internet and wanted the project to be a way of studying it. We had some discussions, and an idea from a colleague led to a very interesting project. The students used the traceroute program, a critical component of the TCP/IP protocol (which is the backbone of the internet), to find the circumference of the earth. What is trivial to look up *on* the internet, becomes a joyful scientific exploration when we look *under* the net. The idea was to send a *packet* around the earth and use traceroute to track the path, and from arrival times at various nodes, estimate the circumference of the earth. With another colleague helping them with the calculations, the students did an excellent project, enjoying learning about speed of light in optical fibre, among other things.

We love stories with morals and this one offers several, such as, technology-based explorations in science and scientific explorations of technology can all be very rewarding and enjoyable, and there is more to internet than Google. We hear a great deal of talk extolling technology-based teaching/learning, and on the other, strident critiques of technology use in classrooms. Both these sides tend to equate technology with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and this restricts us to a narrow vision indeed.

Rather interestingly, while policy documents and governments always refer to 'S&T', such coupling of science and technology is natural to policy but remains alien to the school classroom.

Indeed, if there is one domain that calls for new curricular action in school, it is that of technology.

* Editors' note: An earlier version of this article appeared in 'Voices of Teachers and Teacher Educators', NCERT, VI: 2 (February 2018).

As the third decade of the twenty-first century approaches, our schools still largely ignore technology as an object of curricular engagement. The current school curriculum considers science education to be central, but technology is largely peripheral within it. Other disciplines of study, such as social studies, hardly discuss the role of technology in shaping modern society, let alone critique that role. At the tertiary level, technological studies are termed 'professional' and separated from science. This works well for the large industrialized modes of production, with all technology creation patented and owned by big industry, and the general educated public being merely consumers of technology. Unfortunately, in the poorer countries, this has led to the import of technology in the main, and citizens' ability to innovate confined to the few.

On the other hand, there is an increasing perception that twenty-first century modes of production will allow for small industries created by groups of individuals to innovate without exclusive technological training. The East Asian and western European countries have tried to integrate technology education into school science education, and the study of technology in relation to society is also given curricular stature in these systems. In Sweden, for instance, every high school has a workshop that includes a foundry and carpentry, and science laboratories are integrated with the workshop. The Chinese school system is currently transforming itself to such a model.

The science classroom is the best place to introduce technology to students. This cannot be achieved by 'lessons' on X-technology or Y-technology, to be learnt as information items and memorized. In fact, along with a factual and conceptual understanding of natural phenomena, students also need a fluency in *working with the material world* in a way that builds on experimentation, observation, prediction and critical inquiry. Technology is best learnt by doing, by active engagement with material and energy conversion. Working with metal, wood and soil is essential for building a relationship with nature that is purposeful and wise. This needs the active and simultaneous engagement of the mind, the heart and the hands.

Articulating the goals of science education to include active hands-on engagement with the material world implies according primacy to wood and metal, to leaves and stones, to life forms and crystals—not by seeing them as pictures (or worse, reading their descriptions) in books but touching, feeling and working with them. This is essential for developing an integrated feel for science and technology.

Coupled with experimentation, an emphasis on *quantification* is a characteristic of science. Measuring, estimating, approximating, calculating and model building are everyday processes for any form of science, and these again are habits to be inculcated in the learning child, not only for sharpening her own abilities but also towards building a society that can critically engage with issues of technology use and its impact on the environment. Students need to perceive the rootedness of technology in science, as also the technological potential embedded in science. They need to understand and internalise the fact that technology is the conversion of material and energy in different forms by work, and that this is based on sound scientific principles. Such emphasis in science classrooms could offer an important direction for the future of our children.

Apart from hands-on experience, science pedagogy itself needs to actively make connections with technology. For instance, we rarely teach Pascal's law by pointing out that this is indeed the principle that literally enables huge trucks to be held up on mere rubber tyres pumped with air. The sheer wonder of air holding up a heavy truck is important for the learning child, and further, the tremendous opening up of possibilities in the mind is critical for planting the seeds of technological innovation. Similarly, biodegradation is a phenomenon to be understood, but it is also important to see the possibilities of composting in technological terms. This is a connection mostly missing in our science curriculum, and a careful reworking can make science learning not only immensely enjoyable to children, but also useful to them and to society.

Technomania and ICT

I am well aware that the foregoing discussion takes on an idiosyncratic stance, ignoring the major and very relevant debate on the use of ICT in classrooms. Recent discussions on the 'Draft New Education Policy' or the 'TechVision 2035' document of the Government of India centre on the use of ICT 'in meeting the need for universalization of quality education in India'. Proponents of ICT talk of how it can help overcome the serious problem of lack of 'quality teachers' by providing direct access to 'presentations of high quality' by experts via video and other modes. They also say that ICT would make classes more interesting and offer easy access to information (lessening need for memorisation). It is also true that children take to using ICT very easily.

On the other hand, the dangers of the internet, especially for children, cannot be overemphasized; the recent disasters such as with the Blue Whale

game underline such dangers. Another criticism is about the seductive nature of technology, again especially for the young ones, getting them hooked to fast moving images that deter sober reflection. The television has amply demonstrated how passive it can render children, and it is not a stretch to see similar pitfalls in 'educational technology' as well.

There is some truth in all these propositions, but both sides tend to equate technology use with ICT, and we need to carefully examine underlying assumptions. In a justified backlash against (a seemingly evident) technomania in government policy, we cannot take a unitary position against technology use in classrooms, either. ICT does have a *disruptive* power that needs to be harnessed. We are all acutely aware of the tyranny of the textbook in our schools. ICT offers highly flexible modes of navigating educational material, through the use of hyperlinks and multiple windows. Thus, it can break into the linear structure of our textbooks. It can also tremendously help in localizing and even personalizing content, which is most welcome in a scenario where textbooks and curricula can create a false uniformity. The combination of these two—flexible navigation and personalized content—opens doors to new ways of learning. Consider a child interested in light, exploring art and photography on one side and physics on the other. Such breaking down of compartments is natural in ICT-enhanced education, and is of tremendous value in situations where a teacher is unable to do this.

Once we start envisioning the possibilities, we can see that ICT not only has the potential to enrich our education but indeed can also provide a tool for educational objectives that we *cannot* accomplish without it. As an instance of the latter, consider the question—how would the world look and behave if the acceleration on earth due to gravity were just a tiny bit less? It is hard to imagine such a thing, much harder to quantify what we imagine. A computer simulation can achieve this very well, can make us think, and indeed lead us to more related questions and open-ended exploration. In a mathematics class, we could not only graph a cubic polynomial, but also pull the curve down, predict how the quadratic coefficient would change, and verify it. Try doing it on paper! Consider zooming into topographic maps in geography. Consider visits to museums in another continent.

All these glories of ICT should always be viewed with healthy suspicion. The dangers of unsafe use of the internet are far too real and immediate to be ignored. We also need to be very wary of the seductive nature of ICT, especially when it is translated to mean instant access to fast-moving

images, whether for entertainment or for education. While visualisation of abstractions is a meaningful educational challenge, instant packaged mobile visuals can disengage thought and abstraction, which can harm learning not only at that instant, but for future as well, by causing a craving for such quick answers, making it harder to think. *Hands-on, minds-off* is a real and present danger in ICT use and the classroom cannot provide room for it.

When we break the identification of educational technology with ICT, we can raise the quality of debate. Every time someone speaks of ICT and mentions how children take easily to such technology, how their four-year olds are able to operate smartphones when they couldn't, it is worth remembering that for lakhs of Indian children, working with wood and soil comes naturally too. They have always been good at handling any technology with their nimble fingers, not only ICT. It is the education system that has never taken this ability seriously (until ICT came along).

The questions we need to ask

When we consider the *use of technology for educational purposes*, there are many questions to ask. How does/can technology help and enhance our educational purposes and experiences? How can the education system contribute to the development of such technology? How do we ensure that these educational purposes are indeed being accomplished? While there are no easy answers to these questions, we do need an articulation of some guiding principles, and the following propositions need intensive discussion:

- We need to evaluate technology use in the classroom without equating it with the use ICT use, while being wary of the dangers inherent in the use of ICT.
- We need to see students as *constructors* of knowledge and technology, and not merely consumers of the potential offered by technology.
- Working with nature and materials is essential in education (especially science education), and this means innovative incorporation of other forms of technology than ICT.
- Technology can play a significant role in *engaging* students in learning, and this needs to be understood and used carefully.

Mathematician and educator WW Sawyer wrote, "*Do* things, *make* things, *notice* things, *arrange* things, and only then *reason* about things." Ways of thinking are shaped by ways of doing in the material world. Therefore, understanding of technology and a healthy attitude to it are fundamental to modern life. A wider perspective is sorely needed in the debates surrounding technology in classrooms.

Questioning the Way We Grade

Ashton Macsaylor

As we move into a new school year, I find myself reflecting on our standards of assessment. Not state standards, pushed down on us from above, but our own standards, inner standards—standards of honesty, intelligence and kindness. Does the way we grade make sense? Does it accomplish what we behave as though it accomplishes? Is it fair? And perhaps most importantly, does it awaken the intelligence of our students?

In none of these areas does a traditional grading scheme stand up well to close scrutiny. Yet, while it is easy and tempting to bash the 'traditional system', it is a much more difficult and noble calling to seek out and offer a sane alternative.

During these meditations, I turn to Krishnamurti's words. But he has not left us an instruction booklet—quite deliberately. The message I get is that he understands the complexity of being a strong educator, and also that the requirements may change over time. His voice calls us to stay true to our inner standards; navigating the realities of that task is our burden to bear. He reminds us of the why—we have to figure out the how.

So, I have lately been upon an exploration of the alternatives, an explo-ration which is far from complete. If there is an ideal solution out there, I have not found it yet. This article makes no attempt to offer answers that I have not found. Instead, its goal is simply to raise some question and explore some of the possibilities. No option is perfect, but we each must choose something, and considering the options with clear eyes is a worthwhile endeavour.

Traditional Assessment

Let us begin with the traditional model, at least the one used at Oak Grove High School and throughout a vast majority of California schools. Each activity and assignment that students are asked to complete is worth a number of points. The students earn those points if they complete it and don't if they don't, or perhaps they receive partial credit, based on how well they complete the task. It is likely, reader that you are familiar with this model. Often these points are sorted into categories and each category is given a weight, i.e., made worth a certain percentage of the grade.

This model is ubiquitous, but hardly perfect. The first problem that strikes me is the sense of constant judgement. Each activity, no matter how minor, becomes an opportunity for the student to be weighed, judged, and found wanting. It creates an Orwellian atmosphere in which we as the teachers are cast as Big Brother, constantly watching, and any misstep is punished with a loss of 'points', whatever those are. Students are then sorted, overtly or otherwise, into an impromptu caste system of 'successful' students, 'less successful', students or, well, 'failures'—though few of us would ever willingly use that word. The meaning shines through, whatever vocabulary we choose, and an ugly reality covered up with banal, kind-sounding euphemisms simply adds one more layer in which we play the role of Orwellian overlords.

Is this the atmosphere we want to create for our students? One in which every action is scrutinized and the slightest misstep is punished? Each student in this system may start with a sense of confidence, a feeling of being at an A+, a grade that is slowly eroded as the mistakes and failures pile up, until it drops to whatever will be on their report card. A major error early on, especially in a highly-weighted category, can act as a semi-permanent ball and chain, dragging down the grade until it is manifested on the report card.

We tell ourselves and our students that failure should be celebrated, that students learn best in an environment where they feel free to explore and stumble without censure. How would the baby learn to walk if it was reprimanded each time it tried and failed? Yet our actions do not align with our stated ideology. We may or may not verbally reprimand our students for failure, but we don't have to. Our points system does it for us.

Standards-based grading

A hot item in education in recent years, standards-based grading does indeed offer some solutions, but it also brings its own problems. In the standards-based model, a teacher identifies the specific learning goals that the class will cover, and students receive a unique grade on their success in each of those categories. Consider a math class—one learning goal may be, "I know how to calculate the area of a rectangle." The teacher would teach to this learning goal and assess each student on how well they are able to succeed at this particular task, usually on a 1–4 scale instead of a per cent scale. The student would be expected to continue studying each topic until they are as close to mastery as they can get and re-doing tests and quizzes is not just an opportunity, but an expectation. The parent would receive a report card listing many such standards, with a number next to each one indicating the level of mastery that their child has been able to reach.

It has the advantage, in theory at least, of making it easier to customize each student's educational experience to their own level. The idea is that if you know that three-quarters of the class has mastered finding the area of a rectangle,

but one-quarter still struggles with it, you can provide tailored instruction to each segment of the class, allowing that one-quarter the time they need to catch up.

It's a wonderful vision, to provide conditions in which each student can and must reach mastery, but what concerns me is the realities of the execution of such a plan in what is otherwise a traditional classroom. While a teacher such as you or me would have the information needed to provide each student with a customized educational experience, that doesn't mean we have the time to do so. A traditional classroom model asks one adult to teach fifteen, thirty or more students at once. With only one teacher, all students must receive the same instruction at the same time. Most teachers are already pushing the limits of how much they can differentiate given these restrictions. The reason we don't offer each student a further differentiated experience right now in our everyday practice isn't because we lack data—we know where each student is at—it's because we lack the means in a traditionally structured classroom. The standards-based grading model provides a solution to the wrong problem. For it to work as promised, we would need to seriously reconsider the most foundational structures of school.

It's also important to note that the highly-detailed report card called for in standards-based grading is not effortless. Demanding this form of assessment would add labour to an already-overburdened teacher's workload, and given the limitations we just discussed, the effect on learning outcomes is questionable. Advocates of the standards-based grading point out that preparing such a list with a unique grade for each student in each standard, gives the parents and families a much more meaningful insight into student achievement than simply providing a percentage value and a letter grade. (What does 'B+' really mean, anyway?) With this model, it's very clear exactly what each grade means. However, I think it's actually very important to ask whether it's truly possible to spell out and measure the most important learning outcomes in such a quantifiable, pre-packaged way. Perhaps it's more feasible in math or science, but as an English teacher, much of what we do is challenging to quantify. How do I design a standard measuring for whether a student feels Holden Caulfield's pain and love and hope? If I (or someone) were to break down the skills of excellent writing into a handful of pithy standards, would they accurately reflect a writer's ability to compose words that stimulate the intellect and sear the soul?

Finally, there is an equity obstacle: when we receive a new class, they are not coming in on equal footing, and thus judging them on equal standards is problematic. Each student has travelled their own educational journey, and some students will be better prepared to quickly acquire the skill of measuring the area of a rectangle, while others will lack the foundational knowledge required to quickly master that skill. Still others may already know it! Standards-based grading can take a snapshot of where a student is, but it doesn't reflect how hard they worked or how far they came. A student who already knew about calculating the area of a rectangle may loaf about for that entire unit and still get an excellent grade, while a student who worked and sweated and laboured to master three years' worth of remedial learning—very successfully—may still be rewarded with a poor grade because they didn't get through the fourth year's material as they are 'supposed' to.

It seems that standards-based grading could only truly succeed in standards-based classrooms, where students enter a classroom based not on their age or grade level, but on the level of skills that they are poised to learn.

Ipsative assessment

Standards-based grading uses what is called criterion-referenced assessment, in which student success is measured against a certain absolute standard. Another method of assessment exists called 'ipsative', from the Latin *ipse*, meaning, 'of the self'. This method measures a student's success against their own prior achievement. This can often be seen in real life in physical exercise regimes (where you strive to do more push-ups this week than you did last week) or in computer games (where you strive to beat your own previous best score), and it could potentially have real advantages in the world of education.

This method would show a student's growth, but it contains an implicit expectation that may be unrealistic—that learning consists of a steady upward trajectory. In reality, as with most human pursuits that are worthwhile, it frequently seems to be a matter of taking one step back for every two steps forward. Breakthroughs in understanding and intellectual growth are often preceded by periods of confusion and frustration. I worry about the student who hits one of those plateaus where growth is not obvious or visible. Even if, beneath the surface, their mind is preparing for a great leap, that would not be reflected in the ipsative grade they receive if it comes at an inopportune moment, and the blow that such a low grade could deliver might knock them out of the intrinsic growth curve that they were working on.

I also worry about the student who came into the class already knowledgeable about the stated learning goals for the season. If, as the class begins the unit on calculating the area of a rectangle, one student is already proficient in this, she or he will show no growth over the duration of the unit, and thus would fail according to ipsative assessment.

Norm-referenced assessment

Perhaps worst of all methods, but worth mentioning here, as it is not uncommon, is the method of comparing student success not against empirical standards, nor against their own prior status, but against their peers. It is well-documented that students develop at different rates and that in many areas of learning the age at which a student hits certain milestones has little consequence for their ultimate level

of achievement. Therefore comparing students to their peers gives little useful information. Nor, needless to say, would it hold true to the non-competitive ideals that we strive for as Krishnamurti schools.

No assessment

A final, perhaps obvious option must be mentioned—what if we don't assess at all? There is an idea that the focus of an educator should be on *learning* rather than on *the assessment of learning*. All of the methods above assume a model in which the teacher pours knowledge into the student, who is simply an empty receptacle waiting to be filled.

What if students are not passive receptacles, but capable of pursuing their own interests, driving their own learning? I would posit that most of us have come to our most profound and formative understandings by chasing our own interests. It is rare that something forced on us by outside powers becomes the important, identity-shaping interest that drives us to full, deep understanding. Is this not the ideal mode of learning which Krishnamurti would want us to strive for?

The drawback to this model, of course, is that we need something to show an outside observer—that something is happening in our schools. Whether its parents, colleges, or a distant administrator, there are professionals and adults who desire—rightly so—to have some evidence that the school is doing what it says it is doing. In our case, at Oak Grove, we have made the choice to be a college preparatory school, and therefore we need to communicate to colleges something about what each student has accomplished. Grades are an intrinsic part of that communication.

Are grades truly the best way to impart that information? In our case we attempt to give a fuller picture to outside observers by writing narrative evaluations as well. Some may argue we should use only narrative evaluations, but letter grades are the system that the outside world is primed to accept. Could those grades be generated in an alternative fashion? Certainly, but which one? The other alternatives are all equally flawed, if not more so. Would one simply be trading one set of problems for a different set of problems?

Ultimately, each of us must come to our own answers, if not the sort of primal answers that indicate the questions have been solved, at least an operative answer that allows us to meet the needs of our students, our families, and ourselves each school year. Yet as we do so, it is worth taking the time to reflect upon the practices we have chosen to follow and ask the hard questions.

The Conundrum of Awakening Intelligence

Shashidhar Jagadeeshan

Many traditions over the years have been interested in a way of living grounded in something that is not man-made or created by thought. This way of living is imbued with a quality of flow, an ability to dance with life effortlessly and without a sense of division. A recent description of such a way, albeit in a fictional context, is found in the novel *The Wise Man's Fear* by Philip Rothfuss. The author has invented a culture he calls the 'Ademre', whose way of life is informed by something called the 'Lethani'. Here is a conversation between the hero (who is not an Adem and speaks in first person) and Tempi, an Adem who is trying to explain the Lethani to him.*

"What is the purpose of the Lethani?" Tempi asked.

"To give us a path to follow?" I replied.

"No," Tempi said sternly. "The Lethani is not a path."

"What is the purpose of the Lethani, Tempi?"

"To guide us in our actions. By following the Lethani, you act rightly."

"Is this not a path?"

"No. The Lethani is what help us choose a path."

Does this not remind us of the *intelligence* that J Krishnamurti talks about? This, too, is a state of being that yields right action, and yet there is no hint of a 'path' that leads to intelligence. Through the decades, Krishnamurti remained clear and unwavering on this point, as these quotes from *The Awakening of Intelligence* illustrate.

"Intelligence is not personal, is not the outcome of argument, belief, opinion or reason." (p. 385)

* Excerpt from *The Wise Man's Fear: The Kingkiller Chronicles: Day Two* by Patrick Rothfuss (2011).

> "Thought is of time, intelligence is not of time, intelligence is immeasurable." (p. 420)
>
> "Is there the awakening of that intelligence? If there is ... then it will operate, then you don't have to say, 'What am I to do?'" (p. 421)

In Rothfuss's world, as in traditions such as the *wu wei* of Taoism, *arete* of the Greeks, *sama-sata* in Buddhism or *mushin no shin* of Zen, it is very clear that what is being referred to cannot be captured in words or understood by the conceptual mind. Apparently, *wu wei* means 'non-doing', and *mushin no shin* means 'mind without mind'. However, most of these traditions have some form of practice associated with them, implying that the state of 'no-mind' can be achieved as the result of arduous discipline and hard work over time.

Effort, practice and time are of course anathema to Krishnamurti! His logic is impeccable. He clearly demonstrates, and invites the listener to verify empirically that thought is limited, is the source of inattention and, therefore, of the lack of intelligence. Moreover, psychological time and thought are not really different from each other. According to him, "Intelligence comes into being when the brain discovers its fallibility, when it discovers what it is capable of, what it is not." (*The Awakening of Intelligence*, p. 385). Unfortunately, thought cannot bring about this perception; thought cannot bring about silence. We cannot use the very things we want to be free of, to become free! And here lies a conundrum.

Krishnamurti felt strongly that the awakening of intelligence is the true purpose of education. Yet no matter how radical our vision of education, we end up creating schools and curricula through which students have a series of meaningful experiences over time—and thought is the currency of most of our transactions. Fundamentally, the education is offered by educators who themselves are deeply conditioned.

How do we get around this conundrum? How should we educators think about it?

Major aim, minor aim

Ironically, some of us who have been attracted to education by Krishnamurti's questions and his vision of education might not be educators at all if it were not for the possibility of 'awakening intelligence'. We would agree, I think, to call this our 'major aim' of schooling. Yet, as discussed above, this is an aim that cannot be achieved through a programme. If my understanding is correct, intelligence acts when the self is not. And the

ending of the self is an act of insight. This insight has no cause and cannot be willed. So what does one do?

If we cannot institute a process, can there be an *invitation* to the awakening of intelligence? Perhaps our very approach is flawed. For many of us, 'intelligence' or *mushin* are concepts and ideal states that we wish to achieve in the future. Perhaps, as suggested by Krishnamurti, the clue lies in starting *where we are* with what is observable, and thus, to recognize and understand the *lack* of intelligence, rather than some positive idea of intelligence. Then the world and ourselves become the laboratory for study and experimentation.

The first step towards the major aim of awakening intelligence is to create the right atmosphere for learning. This demands a relationship based on affection and mutual respect between adults and students. If such a relationship is to be nurtured, it is very clear that we cannot use the traditional motivators of fear, competition, reward and punishment. However, simply having these intentions (and housing the school in serene settings!) is not sufficient. For the atmosphere to have a living quality, there has to be an active exploration of the nature of conditioning and how it impacts daily life. This demands a culture of listening and communication among all members of the community. Dialogue is, therefore, central to such a school.

Another mirror to our conditioning is relationship. Very often our deep biases and patterns of response are hidden from our view. We have many blind spots when it comes to ourselves. It is in our reactions to others, in the emotions and thoughts emanating in the theatre of relationship, that our conditioning, our deep sense of being separate, is continually revealed. For relationship to be such a mirror, it has to be imbued with a great sense of compassion, and a renewed realisation that 'self-knowledge' does not mean the accumulation of information and images about oneself. If one is not watchful, the network of relationships can end up becoming either oppressive with hurt and conflict, or merely functional, or (worse!) a mutual admiration club.

Creating such an environment is no small order, but let us say we have managed to do so. Now in what ways can we the adults and students investigate the 'lack of intelligence'? The backdrop for the whole investigation is an understanding of two states of being—awareness and attention.

> If I watch myself being angry, I stop being angry. Right? If I watch myself being happy, (laughs) happiness stops. So can you be aware of your movement of thought? This awareness is not identified with thought. Just to

> watch it, sir, like watching this microphone— watch it. But if I say, 'It's a microphone', it's that colour, this, who is sitting behind it, who's talking, I am not watching. So I say, can you watch yourself as though you were looking at a mirror that doesn't distort? And I said, when there is this alert watchfulness...[it] moves into attention in which there is no centre from which you attend. So when there is complete attention, with your heart, with your mind, with everything you have—to attend—then that intelligence begins to operate.
>
> J Krishnamurti, Fourth Public Dialogue in Ojai, California, April 1977

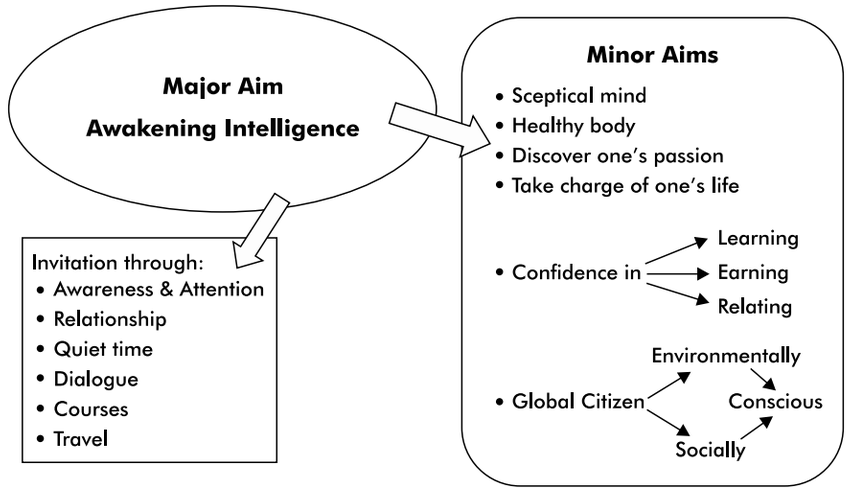
Again, the question for the educator is how, without creating practices or programmes, can there be an invitation to awareness? Since the ego is rather clever, it can convert anything into an opportunity to enhance itself. Thus, any *effort* in the direction of becoming attentive or aware can soon become part of a self-enhancement programme, which itself is an impediment to being aware!

Having said this, it still seems important to have certain spaces during the day and week explicitly dedicated to self-learning. We need time for regular dialogue, for teachers and students to patiently unravel their programming, and constantly keep alive the possibility of living without conflict. It also makes sense to have large chunks of time set aside where the whole school does—nothing ! By nothing, we mean no activity, including those that may seem to promote quietness such as reading or listening to music. Everyone is encouraged to be by themselves, alone, not in the company of others. All this is to help us be present, because in the hustle and bustle of daily life, preoccupations and programming take over. A variety of interesting experiments can be tried out during such quiet times, such as noticing how we are constantly thinking of the past and the future, discovering what we are mainly concerned with when we are quiet, why it is so difficult to enjoy the present moment, why it is so difficult to simply do nothing. Perhaps the nature of thought and its structure may unravel itself if we quietly observe?

More and more of our time is being spent in gazing at screens, in a kind of virtual reality. Some psychologists are seriously concerned about a new syndrome they call the 'nature-deficit syndrome'. In our curriculum, then, it will be important to encourage a relationship with nature and the world of things not constructed by thought. Travel, too, is a way of moving out of the 'bubble' we live in. Carefully planned experiences of this kind can be powerful pointers to the crisis we humans face today, and could serve as a catalyst to seeing the cost of our self-centred living.

All that I have described above must be at the heart of the curriculum, but the effects of such endeavours are intangible and immeasurable. On the other hand, every school has its nuts-and-bolts curriculum, if I can call it that. We can conceive then of 'minor aims', worthy in their own right. One way of understanding the big picture is illustrated in the diagram. I ask for the patience of the purists in this endeavour!

THE BIG PICTURE



This division into major aims and minor aims is one attempt to answer the question—what exactly is our education attempting to do? Framing the intentions of the school in the above manner provides both a lens to critique what we are attempting to do and also a framework for creative programmes and approaches, especially with regard to the minor aims.

There are two parts to our minor aims. One is to build the ability to live in a complex world, by which we don't mean merely static knowledge and a set of skills, but rather, the facility to be a flexible and confident learner. Thus, our curriculum should focus more on process than content, building a sceptical capacity in the student's mind. Also, we ask what it means to help someone find what they love to do in life without constant resistance and worry about security and future.

The other part is to have a world-view which is not divisive. Elements of such a worldview would include a sceptical mind with a global outlook, and which is deeply conscious of the social and environmental crisis facing us today. Obviously for students to apprehend such a worldview, the educators

cannot be 'narrow-minded'; they must be intellectually curious, engaged in understanding themselves and the society that they are a part of.

Once there is clarity in what we are attempting, we can draw upon a variety of resources to translate the minor aims into curricular practice. For example, a school can study its use of resources such as energy and water, and learn about waste disposal. Courses can be designed on wider issues in society such as caste, gender and media literacy. There could be a strong emphasis on intimacy with the natural world in the life of the student. The *Journal of Krishnamurti Schools* often carries articles describing courses translating philosophy into practice.

What is the relationship between the major aims and the minor aims? I think any educational institution devoted solely to the minor aims can feel that it is engaged in something worthwhile and meaningful. Ideally, if all of us were living embodiments of the 'minor aims', then perhaps the world would be a very different place! However, the more we delve into what makes the human world the way it is, and the more we attempt to 'do something about it', we encounter a certain fundamental ignorance, a deep lack of intelligence. We are then forced to come back to the whole business of awakening intelligence and the challenges in this realm.

The first and foremost challenge is that the conditioning that the educator, parent and child bring to the table militates against anything that will seriously threaten it! Teachers, like everyone else, try to maintain a certain status quo of seeking security, moving towards pleasure and comfort and avoiding discomfort and pain. Parents may or may not understand the intention of the education and will consciously or subconsciously translate the intentions of the school in the light of their fears and ambitions for their child. Students are a reflection of the society they live in and even though they are far more open than adults, and there is always the great potential for something different to happen, they are strongly influenced by very powerful vested interests.

It seems no matter how well intentioned we are, how willing to pour in a lot of energy and resources into our programmes, how clearly we may think about things, we don't seem to be making a serious dent in conditioning and how it unfolds. If only 'intelligence' can act upon this conditioning, and all our attempts come from the ground of conditioning, we are lost. We cannot purposefully create the ground of intelligence and compassion, and this is the basic conundrum of 'awakening intelligence'. Let us not move away from this fundamental insight in the daily work of running the school.

Making Your Own Curriculum

A conversation between educators

EDITORS

Imagine the following conversation as one taking place between a thoughtful educator, the questioner (Q), who wishes to start a new school, and an experienced teacher-administrator (T), who responds from her experience of working at an alternative school.

Q: *We are starting a school for children in our neighbourhood. We would really like to make their education meaningful, make a space for them to learn and grow with affection rather than fear and standardized expectations. We are not planning to adopt the curriculum of any existing board, at least until the school-leaving examinations stage. Could we discuss how we can come up with our 'own curriculum'?*

T: This is exciting, to have the freedom to design your own curriculum for a school. But could we first look into why you would want to start from scratch? And what does 'curriculum' mean to you?

Q: *Curriculum is, I think, how the scope and progression of learning is organized in a school. Generally, we receive curricula as lists of topics to be covered and textbooks that should be studied. This seems very unsatisfactory to us. It makes for a standardized approach, whereas we want something suitable to our context, our surroundings. Also, in our experience, the established curricula tend to be too content-heavy. Should a curriculum be so full of information to be learned and memorised? We don't feel so.*

T: I completely agree with you on these points! A curriculum should be flexible, not an ossified thing that we repeat each year. Teachers should be able to breathe new life into a curriculum every year. So in a very real sense, this is never a once-and-for-all exercise; it will have to be re-visited regularly.

One starting point might be to ask—what are the backgrounds and experiences of your children? How can they connect the experiences they have in their homes and neighbourhoods with the learning in school? They

should not experience a sharp home-school divide from the beginning. So do find out what skills and attitudes they are coming with. Because, as you know, a great deal is imbibed from home and community, and you will need to take that into account. What will you want to draw upon and reinforce, and what might you want them to be able to question, even if at a later stage? Of course, all this has to be informed by your overall aims for education.

Q: *I see the importance of sensitivity to where the children are and what they bring with them. In terms of our overall aims, we feel that to live in the world, children need a set of contemporary competencies and skills and many kinds of awareness. Beyond basic numeracy and literacy, I would include things like the ability to articulate clearly, work with others, spatial understanding, a sense of the past and how it is shaping the present, and a sense of local and global issues. Also an understanding of materials and objects, the technology of everyday life, and the way technology impacts our lives...the list goes on! But if we include everything we want to, won't the curriculum get heavy—the very thing we wanted to avoid in the first place?*

T: Quite right, you need to avoid the temptation to pack in everything that a group of adults have found interesting over their combined lifetimes! Can you think more in terms of core skills and learning dispositions, than in terms of content? Learning to think clearly and to love learning could do more for lifelong learning than any number of subjects. The educator WW Sawyer put it so well in his book, *The Mathematician's Delight*... here, let me read it to you:

> If a child left school at ten, knowing nothing of detailed information, but knowing the pleasure that comes from agreeable music, from reading, from making things, from finding things out, it would be better off than a man who left university at twenty-two, full of facts but without any desire to enquire further into such dry domains.

Your other point is good, too. A curriculum needs to be in alignment with the needs of contemporary life and society, and a rapidly changing world at that, in which your children are growing. So, all that you listed could form the elements of such a curriculum. You will need to articulate your aims and the broad contours of a curriculum that reflects these aims, and also outline how it might progress over the school-going years of the child. This could give you a sound launching pad.

Q: *We have also been thinking about a deeper level of curriculum. I've heard it called 'the hidden curriculum', a subtler learning that happens by imbibing the*

culture of a school. Now we do not know if this can be put down into words, although we sense that it could be of even greater importance than the formal teaching that we will do!

T: Yes, there is definitely a need for schools to be keenly aware of the culture they are creating. This is one thing that cannot be simply 'written and handed down' by those who establish and run the school. A culture is created by the quality of daily interactions and relationships among all the participants in a school. The administrators and teachers have to be especially interested in the part they play in creating the culture, in the nature of the hidden curriculum and the quality of emotional climate in the school. This requires an on-going nurturing of various human qualities.

For instance, in our school we value the human capacities to observe, to listen, to hold attention, to be sensitive to one's surroundings, to be reflective. Without all this, I feel we cannot be in contact with our world, learn to see it as it is, and respond with resilience and emotional maturity to people and changing life situations. This of course applies to teachers as much as the students. Like the children, they too come with their own background experiences, and they need to understand the importance of questioning their own patterns of behaviour, assumptions, biases, and nurture the abilities to observe and listen and learn afresh. Some time and opportunity needs to be provided for this type of inquiry.

Q: *I can see that this is going to be quite a challenge, finding teachers who are committed to their work and who are willing to learn and grow with the children!*

T: Yes, in order to create the type of school you are talking about, you will need to look for teachers who, no matter what background they come from, will find it worthwhile to think together about themselves, their work, and the overall set of learning experiences for their students. If there is a culture of talking and thinking together, it can be invigorating. Your school could become a place which attracts and retains teachers who see the value of this. Differences and conflicts will arise, but as long as there is an interest in how we all think, the process need not wear us down!

Q: *Now could we go into something more specific. How could we frame the curricula for specific subjects over the years? I am assuming we won't rely heavily on 'prescribed textbooks'. We would like to use multiple and diverse resources, including the internet. So how should we choose our teaching-learning material and evolve our pedagogy?*

T: Let's begin by asking, what is the essential *way of thinking* that characterises each subject? For example, in history, based on evidence and sources, narratives are constructed about the past. We have to remain aware of the source of historical information. The narrative can always be interpreted from different points of view, and we have to understand how to weigh these. Students should learn how to look at the present as a product of the past, and also that all of our underlying human emotions and tendencies play out in larger historical events. Such considerations would give you a way of approaching the teaching of history. Further, what are the skills and abilities that students can develop through this subject? For example, in history, the basic skills of reading, listening or watching something with comprehension are very important. Reading between the lines is also very important. Also they must learn to place events in a broad chronology (I don't mean memorising dates!). They must learn to see causal links among events and developments, in such a way as to not oversimplify things into single narratives. This is a very subtle skill, perhaps you could call it a deeper value—to always seek nuanced understandings, and not get caught in one-sided narratives that construct narrow, divisive identities.

You will need to look for materials that reflect such an understanding of the purpose of teaching history, and encourage teachers to collect or devise materials as well as ways in which these purposes can be brought into to their interactions with students.

Q: *There are of course values embedded within every area of knowledge. I can see that as teachers, it will be important to bring out these values and perspectives, as well as the possibilities and limits of each subject. Can we try this same exercise with mathematics?*

T: Since math is my subject area, see if this makes sense. We normally see math as being about a practical manipulation of numbers and spatial relations for conducting daily life—how much change, how many square feet of carpeting. But we should convey that math goes far beyond this. In the first place, it is a language that uncannily describes and predicts regularities in the natural world—for example, the constant *pi* keeps popping up in many unexpected equations, relationships and situations. And at another level, mathematics is its own consistent world, a world of relationships, patterns that need not have any real world correlates. So in teaching this subject, I would choose material that emphasises pattern recognition and problem solving as much as arithmetic and algorithms. Another fallacy about the

subject is that it is only about logical proof. But I would emphasise the role of creativity, imagination and beauty in a mathematics curriculum. Such perspective and the required abilities and skills can be drawn out from an early age, and one will need to find developmentally appropriate tasks and activities from the wide range of resources that are available today.

Q: *This is very good to know! Teachers too need to re-think their pre-existing ideas about what mathematics is and how to teach it. If one provides them the space to approach the subject as both learners and teachers of the subject, I can imagine many rich discussions among teachers, and a more lively approach to its curriculum and teaching.*

T: Along with all this, do keep in mind that you have to make choices, to create balance between breadth of exposure and depth of understanding. Going back to history, for example, don't begin by predefining the whole scope of knowledge that children 'must have'. Actually, any small part studied well could be said to reflect the whole of the discipline. At one time, you may want to highlight something that is locally relevant, at another, the intimate influence of a narrative from very far away. At the same time, there has to be a growing sense in the children of a time-line, a chronology of causal patterns stretching across time.

Q: *Recently there has been a lot of talk about 'inter-disciplinarity'. How do you see that finding a place in a school curriculum?*

T: There is great value in the ability to see the world as a whole, which perhaps children do have before they begin to learn subjects in compartments. From an early age, they touch, listen to and observe everything around them. In the early years of school we need to nurture their use of the senses, their capacity to experience phenomena in their wholeness. They should also be encouraged to express their responses in multiple ways, including languages, art, craft, music, enactment and so on, without channelling these into subject-wise compartments. One way of doing this is through theme-based learning, in which at least some part of the primary curriculum consists of broad themes, such as 'water' or 'soil' or 'celebrations in our lives'. These can be explored from multiple perspectives and become avenues for cross-curricular learning.

As they grow older, however, it is useful to engage with subject disciplines, for this allows teachers and students to focus on a variety of relevant content and teach ways of thinking in different domains of knowledge in our world,

including mathematics, the sciences, the humanities and social sciences. In developing such domain-specific understanding, creative and empathetic thinking would be complemented with logical and critical thinking.

Side by side, for older students too there should be space provided for individual or group projects that require students to work from, and think across, different disciplines. For example, there could be projects to research, represent, analyse, understand and respond to some real-world issues in their neighbourhood, in the local region, or at a global level. Observations and data gathered from field visits or extended excursions can be an intrinsic part of such projects. Such projects give students an opportunity to develop a wide range of abilities and skills that prepare them for dealing with more complex issues they would meet in their life after school.

Q. *What you say certainly presents a wider view of the curriculum and puts in perspective the place of each discipline, along with inter-disciplinarity. Another question at the back of my mind is—how does one get students actively involved in these kinds of learning, and to become more responsible for their own learning and growth?*

T: This is not an easy question, for a great deal of what your students do depends on how you and your teachers come to visualize the development and growth of children, as well as the approaches to 'teaching' and 'learning' at different stages of a child's life in school. Further, the kinds of assessment and feedback that are prevalent, the equations you develop with parents, the nature of parent-teacher-student conversations as well as the modes of 'reporting' that you adopt, all of these will also have a bearing on the emotional climate and atmosphere of learning that you generate and sustain in the school. They too contribute to the so-called 'hidden curriculum' or culture of the school, which encourages students to be either more passive recipients or active learners.

Some questions you could keep in mind are the following: To what extent do students have the freedom to ask questions, plan their own engagements in curricular learning, and propose their own ideas? Is there some flexibility in the curriculum that allows teachers and students to set their goals for learning? What is the balance between promoting individual learning and learning in groups? To what extent is assessment and feedback specifically geared to support each child's growth? In what ways are students encouraged or expected to monitor their own progress and learning needs, and also support their own peers' learning?

Q: *This suggests to me that from the beginning we have to be very alert about having fuller conversations on these topics among administrators, teachers and parents, and evolve appropriate attitudes, structures and practices in our school. Otherwise we might unwittingly fall once again into standardized ways of doing things, which undercut the basic aims we started out with. What you said also brought into focus the role of parents in this whole endeavour. What could be some ways to strive for the right kind of equation with parents towards supporting our aims and curriculum?*

T: You know we have circled around to one of the most critical factors in sustaining a meaningful education. Parents of the children are their first teachers and will remain invested in them for life. Since you must be somewhat aware of the exposure and concerns of parents of children in your surroundings, you probably sense that some parents may implicitly resonate with your concerns, while others may have more standardized expectations from schooling. It will be your responsibility to engage with all parents, from the beginning, in building a common understanding of the aims and basis of your curriculum. As an educator, with some experience of working with different kinds of children, you can surely bring a wider perspective to the parents, whose only experience is limited to their own children. You may need to allay their anxieties and insecurities about how they will cope with the pressures of contemporary life. You will need to show them, in as many concrete ways as you can, how your attempt is to bring a kind of learning that will not only provide their children with the necessary skills to function well in the world, but also enable them to have the sensibilities and tools to grow as creative, happy, self-aware human beings.

Q: *Yes, I see what you mean. Setting up a school of this kind does require us to invite the parents to become engaged partners in the process of education of their child. It will not be so easy; but it is surely a challenge worth taking up…*

There is a lot more one would like to discuss. I am thinking about the following questions: how children with different abilities and special needs can thrive in the school environment? How to help students discover and nurture any special talents they may have? How to ensure that our students are not at a handicap when it comes to taking standardized school-leaving examinations? … and so on. Perhaps we could take these up another time.

Valuing Vulnerability

Why clip the wings of a butterfly?

Anantha Jyothi

… The tree is made up of the roots, the trunk, the branches, the big ones and the little ones and the very delicate one that goes up there; and the leaf, the dead leaf, the withered leaf and the green leaf, the leaf that is eaten, the leaf that is ugly, the leaf that is dropping, the fruit, the flower—all that you see as a whole when you see the tree. In the same way, in that state of seeing the operations of your mind, in that state of awareness, there is your sense of condemnation, approval, denial, struggle, futility, the despair, the hope, the frustration; awareness covers all that, not just one part…

J Krishnamurti, *The Book of Life*

On a Saturday afternoon around twenty teachers—mostly house parents—had gathered for a workshop session called 'Care for Care Givers' conducted by Parivarthan Counselling, Training and Research Centre based in Bengaluru. What is noteworthy is that as a group of teachers, we were quite a loquacious lot, sharing views freely and yet, we struggled to express our emotions. Earlier, in the warm up leading to the sessions, we had looked at pictures, worked with clay and were even given a colourful picture of an emotional wheel which had a large vocabulary of 'feeling' words. Surprisingly, or maybe not really so, we struggled to express what we felt. We would readily say what we thought. Our facilitators would gently nudge us, "That is fine, but tell us how do you feel?" Ultimately, we all said something. Many looked at the emotional wheel to find the right expression. Some of us have known each other for more than ten years and we have worked closely together and yet, here we were, not able to articulate what we were feeling.

All through our lives, we have been taught that emotions are negative or worse, a sign of weakness. Who has not heard expressions such as: "Do not

speak like an emotional fool?" Or, "Don't become emotional." Emotions are seen as capricious; vulnerability is looked at as a sign of weakness; holding feelings in check is often lauded as an ideal. As teachers and parents, we do strive towards building strong children. The moot question here is—Is there strength in supressing and shielding our vulnerability or in openly meeting and accepting it? A straightforward answer to this would make life too simple and insipid. The great tree in its entirety contains it all—the leaf, the dead leaf, the withered leaf and the green leaf, the leaf that is eaten, the leaf that is ugly, the leaf that is dropping… condemnation, approval, denial, struggle, futility, the despair, the hope, the frustration; awareness covers all that…. It is all a part of the whole, a continuum.

Unfortunately, we are at times deadlocked in a binary world that packages life under neat labels. We do not like to see the different shades or the continuum of things. I cringe when I hear doting parents or grandparents blatantly ask a child, "Are you a good boy or a bad boy?" The moral burden of this question is carried throughout our lives. There is a primaeval urge to always show ourselves in a favourable light. We hide our different selves and project a 'self' that would be most lauded or accepted.

It is not that we do not talk about these things in our students. 'Competition', 'comparison', 'peer pressure' and 'excellence' are by-words in our school. Yet, how often do we actually talk about our vulnerabilities or fears? Even when children bring up these topics, I have often seen adults too quick to reassure and encourage the students. Consciously or unconsciously, we are always helping students build up images about themselves. So, if a child feels that he or she is not good at something, we are quick to point out how good they are at something else. There is a girl in class twelve who is doing extremely well on several fronts. One day she quipped, "I sing so horribly. I am always out of tune, but I still love to sing." I wonder how many of us have that kind of courage to try something out of our comfort zone. I know of a teacher who, when doing a problem from a topic unfamiliar even to her, did it on the black-board with the intent that the students would see her struggle through it, and thereby learn that it is alright to struggle through a problem. However, a few students harshly judged her to be an incompetent teacher. Despite what those one or two students may have thought, it was an extraordinary attempt on the part of the teacher to openly show her struggle.

Once in a dialogue with Mary Zimbalist, Krishnamurti remarked on how fear is an 'extraordinary jewel'. He further said:

> You have the feeling of beauty, the feeling of the intricate pattern, and the sparkle, the brightness, and the sparkle of the jewels and so on. So we can deal with the fact of fear and look at it that way, not escape, not say, 'Well I don't like fear', get nervous, apprehensive and suppress it, or control it, or deny it, or move into another field.
>
> *Reflections on the Self*

Vulnerability too is an extraordinary jewel, which perhaps should be held gently, especially in the context of our schools. We need to enable our students to access their own vulnerability instead of constantly trying to suppress or control it. Our value system leans heavily towards the binary mind frame. We try to nurture humane qualities in our children by showing them how to be sensitive, kind, generous, etc. We build a heroic ideal around these qualities. In contrast, anger and hatred are portrayed as demonic qualities. The quarrel here is not about the rightness or wrongness of particular acts. Rather, it is about building awareness about the multitude of emotions that we feel, to see and to understand them all. When a student swears or lies, we quickly condemn and say that it is a bad thing to do. We never reach out to the anger or hurt that may be a cause or even a symptom of this behaviour.

Yet, in examining all this we straddle a thin line. We could as easily get into not seeing the wrong at all. When students are taught that to lie is wrong, one hardly tells them that, "you must not lie for it is a betrayal of the trust someone has gifted you". Similarly, that when one swears at the other, it is a violation of the other person. Teaching one to access one's own inner vulnerability allows us to understand the roots of this anguish and thereby, sows seeds for a more empathetic nature.

Not just in real life, but in the world of literature too, we see how our viewpoint colours the way we look at a character in a play or novel. We often fail to see the entirety of a character. We always try to highlight a few traits in order to understand one. For instance, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the dramatic portrayal of Caliban has ranged from seeing him as an exotic monster, a beast, a colonised native or a worker. He is, thus, always seen as a manifestation of a political ideal. His vulnerability only gets a passing mention. Similarly, in the case of *Macbeth*, the critics look at the grandeur of Macbeth's image driven to ruin by the one tragic flaw in his nature—ambition. When he hesitates to murder the King, Lady Macbeth chides his cowardice and questions his manliness. Yet it is at this 'weak' moment that one catches a glimpse of Macbeth's vulnerability that makes him seem more human than simply a warrior turned into a murderer. Similarly, in a later scene, when a demented Lady Macbeth sleepwalks, she is at her most vulnerable moment. This state of fragility tugs at the reader's mind. When she dies, Macbeth does not even have a moment to mourn her and cries out in anguish, "She should have died hereafter". It is at this moment too that one catches a glimpse of the 'human' side of Macbeth.

In a totally different context, Elizabeth Frazer comments on how children are often encouraged to be a 'good soldier' and the suppression of their grief is admired. She writes, "Parents who teach their children to be good soldiers, fight the good fight, and suppress feelings of grief may well be avoiding feelings of grief themselves." She exposes the vicious circle of such training thus, "Almost everywhere we find the effort, marked by varying degrees of intensity and by the use of various coercive measures, to rid ourselves as quickly as possible of the child within us—i.e., the weak, helpless, dependent creature—in order to become an independent, competent adult deserving of respect. When we reencounter this creature in our children, we persecute it with the same measures once used on ourselves."

This finds beautiful resonance in a story read out in one of our assemblies by a former student turned writer, Sunithi Namjoshi. In this story she talks about a child born with wings. The neighbours and family chastise the parents and ask them to clip the child's wings. The parents refuse to do so. Instead they decide to teach the child to learn how to fly. Adults, who even as children are taught to supress their grief, fail to truly see the butterfly within themselves and mercilessly clip its wings. They remain quite unaware of the flight that can be borne out of the delicate wings. Our vulnerable self or the butterfly self as Frazer terms it, must be allowed to fully develop and not be dwarfed. It needs to be encouraged to fly. Literature can indeed be a great resource to help students reach out to their own emotions.

I would like to end with a heart-warming story. The children were practising for their nativity play to be staged during Christmas. One small boy who was playing the inn keeper was very reluctant to turn away Joseph and Mary from his door. The teacher explained to him that he had no choice, as there was no room in his inn to offer to the couple. He still felt uncomfortable but accepted the explanation. On the day of the play, he told Mary and Joseph in a tremulous voice that there was no room in the inn; but he quickly added, "But won't you come in and have a cup of tea."

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Pathashaala

The inner life of a residential 'K' school

Sumitra M Gautama

The day goes by
Activities friends and classes.
I only pause to see the evening sun again.

Vaishali's poem, class 10
Pathashaala Newsletter 2018

Can school be a place of radical change? Krishnamurti spoke about radical, fundamental change as the keynote of all learning—this learning is not in doing but in intense observing of oneself and reflecting upon it. Vaishali speaks of one such moment of perception of a day gone by, a day of lived patterns, of structures of thoughts, attitudes and feelings. The 'pause' she talks of is her lived inquiry, her inner life, which she shares poetically. The 'inner' life of Pathashaala is thus not in the schedules of school but in its scope and space that allows for such moments of reflection. In his Public Talk 3, Brockwood Park, 6 September 1980, Krishnamurti asks, "Why is there this inward disorder, which naturally must express itself in outward disorder?"

This 'inner' conflict, replete with emotions, holds the key to all the disorder in the world, and to the resolving of that disorder. Krishnamurti talks about the first step being the last step and ways of 'ending' conflict. He speaks poignantly of flowering in goodness, of awakening the intelligence that will look at that disorder and in looking, end it. The inner space of Pathashaala is the arena of such churning. It is a journey with no known end that is framed within a work-in-progress structure.

In following Krishnamurti's vision of the whole of life being a process of learning, there are many questions that K schools have raised in the world of schooling—Does one automatically become intelligent by

pursuing academics? Does one learn the art of healthy relationships and social skills purely through being with peers for a few hours each day? Can one compartmentalize the flowering of goodness? Does playing of games always result in building good teams? Does going to school ensure that one learns values such as openness, listening, compassion, respect and sensitivity? Aligning our inner and outer worlds as learner and educator is vitally linked to these possibilities in many ways.

Pathashaala is the youngest of the KFI residential schools, a mere eight years in existence, situated in the village of Elimichampattu on a flat piece of land about eighty kilometres from Chennai. However, Pathashaala too shares questions and experiences that may be common to all other K schools. I have attempted to reflect on the inner life of a residential school, through my own perceptions and those of my colleagues and students at Pathashaala.

There does not seem to be any aspect of life in a residential school that does not involve feelings or awareness, in the practical, transactional sense of these words. Priya, a resident EL (Educator-Learner) at Pathashaala says, "Any hat I wear, be it one of EL, LE (Learner-Educator) or parent, the possibility of education devoid of any emotion just ceases to exist. That said, I also face the challenge it brings, to be present to these emotions that might at times possibly erode the space of freedom; open sharing; the spirit of caring and that of listening; as these emotions would bring to the surface the conditioning that we all carry."

The interactive space of the school appears to extend and permeate multiple frames of being and learning—in the dorm, in the playground, in the classroom and in the assembly hall. Alongside this, is an inner space within which one carries a sense of aloneness—a child walking along a familiar path but deep in thought; an EL and LE sitting together in a quiet moment and psychologically far from the hustle and bustle of the dining hall; eyes on a book, contemplating a sunset, staring into the dark in bed after lights-out. There is constantly the challenge of the unfamiliar, the unknown, and the need to cope with it. This sense of one's aloneness seems embedded in rituals of engagement and patterns of constructed relationships.

As Aparnna, an EL profoundly put it, "Journeys, the real ones, are never smooth". She continues, "Jealousy, fear and anxiety at times overpower the virtue of education, thus shifting our focus to the search for an end product rather than reiterating that education is an ongoing journey connecting outer reality to inner self."

Feelings are the raw core of all interactions, and developing an awareness of them seems as important as learning. What does this imply in terms of K education? Can wellness at school be planned and executed through protocols and frames? What will ensure vulnerability and order? Inquiry, curiosity, observation, persistence, the invitation to reflect…How is one to ensure that these are present in the atmosphere of school? One approach may be through acknowledging thoughts and feelings themselves; raising questions for clarification rather than moving on, based on unarticulated assumptions; voicing what has been understood; building the possibility of "if I were to do it again"; and thereby negotiating collaboration and respectful engagement. This is not always easy.

When asked how emotions were addressed in the learning space, an LE at Pathashaala put it thus, "There is space given to be with the emotions. When one person's emotions affect another person, it is not always addressed. Probably, it is due to the affected person not speaking enough about it. But, when a group of people get affected, it is addressed and discussed sufficiently. Situations of dysfunctional expression of conflicted emotions need an inner space to resolve. It is difficult to evoke this in a collective space without many repercussions, both outer and inner. What does an individual do in such a situation?"

K says, "Don't be afraid of your strong feelings!"

Yet, as we all know, individuals in most contexts approach intense feeling with wariness. All religions seem to have a pejorative approach to feelings such as anger, jealousy, intense desire, hate, loneliness, aversion, smallness, sadness, sexual desire etc. This is seen in the 'advice' or 'means' to eradicate such feelings or manage them. Krishnamurti asks, "Can you watch anger like a jewel?" The drama of life in learning is enacted around questions like these.

A junior (class 6) LE of Pathashaala says, "Sometimes my emotions are uncontrollable and so I act violently. I act from my subconscious mind. I am able to talk about it. The sequence of handling this in school is warning, time out and out of the school for some time. In general, I have only 50 % space for sharing emotions. We could express our emotions in our letters to our parents and in our diaries, if we want. I have seen that we vent out anger on plants."

Another LE who was then in class 10 reflects, "Initially, I thought emotions had no place in education. Now, I am realizing that they play a major role. When I feel sad, when I have a fight with someone, fear kicks in and therefore, I am not able to study properly. Sometimes, it is the other way around. When I am not able to study, fear comes in and I feel sad. Education also helps in bringing good feelings in us. Sometimes I really enjoy studying and I want to learn more. Personally, there is some struggle dealing with emotions. Sometimes, I feel I can deal with them. Sometimes, I need help by way of just talking to someone about my feelings."

Through discussions, ELs in Pathashaala felt that there were four pillars on which a reflective inner life could be constructed—structures for healthy and safe living; term plans and teaching-learning strategies that disallow put-downs and foster resourcefulness in ELs and LEs; participation with transparency and without hierarchy; and processes that build choiceless engagement with the challenges and opportunities of working together.

Within this configuration, each EL and LE evolves ways of being aware and facilitating awareness. This is a path that keeps challenging one's creativity. Personally, I have found the following ways: I have allowed expression of feelings and validated the existence of feelings; I have helped students understand and respect diverse approaches without allowing peer harassment; I have facilitated theatre as a way of owning the disowned. It is, and has been, a tough demand to sometimes see the struggle of individuals, and unconditionally support the being of the person, however much the feelings challenge oneself. As Bhavya, a senior LE succinctly put it, "Discussions help, sometimes emotions go under the carpet, I think." In conclusion, these questions from Gautama's insightful article on 'Transitions in School Education' may help the journey along …

Do you know how to be with another constructively?

Do you know how not to be invalidated by your friends?

Are you clear that respect for the other is not a conditional matter for you?

Do you know how to intervene in an ongoing process effectively, healthily?

How do you understand your feelings and those of others?

What happens when you feel something that troubles you?

How is insight different from an opinion, a point of view?

Book Review

Venkatesh Onkar

Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind (2014)

Yuval Noah Harari

Harper

> *Is there anything more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don't know what they want?*

Sapiens was first published in English in 2014 and has since become a best-seller of sorts, garnering many awards from prestigious institutions. It has also attracted much scholarly criticism, the main thrust of which is that the book overly generalises, makes too many speculative leaps and is not accurately referenced. Whatever the validity of both praise and censure, *Sapiens* is valuable and insightful for its broad sweep across 'human history' and also for its insights into the human predicament, historical and contemporary. The ideas in the book are not particularly new (multiple human species co-existed on the planet at one point in time, the agricultural revolution was not conducive to human health, we are surrounded by social constructs that we mistake as fundamentally real). What makes it fascinating is the manner of the telling and, more importantly, the abiding interest in the possibility of having an insight into our collective conditioning. This makes *Sapiens* of special interest to educators within a Krishnamurti context.

To begin with, *Sapiens* is a tremendous resource for a social science teacher. The author points to many areas that students and teachers can explore and research together—the origins of writing, of money, the structures of monotheistic religions:

> [Writing] was limited to facts and figures. The great Sumerian novel, if there ever was one, was never committed to clay tablets...If we look for the first words of wisdom reaching us from our ancestors, 5,000 years ago, we're in for a big disappointment. The earliest messages our ancestors have left us read, for example, '29,086 measures barley 37 months Kushim'. The most probable reading of this sentence is: 'A total of 29,086 measures of barley were received over the course of 37 months. Signed, Kushim.' Alas, the first texts of history contain no philosophical insights, no poetry, legends, laws, or even royal triumphs. They are humdrum economic documents, recording the payment of taxes, the accumulation of debts and the ownership of property.

This is a great springboard into an exploration of various writing systems in the world (many of which are referenced in *Sapiens*) and also into the role of writing in daily life today (emails, sms, Facebook postings). Harari similarly explores a whole range of human social practices in an engaging and subtle style, with much for an educator to ponder. However, this is only one aspect of the book's depths. There are many other works that could serve as sources for our middle-school projects. The beauty of *Sapiens* lies mostly in its interest in our psychological worlds and our capacity to learn about them.

Near the end of *Sapiens*, looking back on the sweep of human progress, the author considers the nature of human happiness:

> But are we happier? Did the wealth humankind accumulated over ...centuries translate into a new-found contentment? Did the discovery of inexhaustible energy resources open before us inexhaustible stores of bliss? ...Was the late Neil Armstrong, whose footprint remains intact on the windless moon, happier than the nameless hunter-gatherer who 30,000 years ago left her handprint on a wall in Chauvet Cave? If not, what was the point of developing agriculture, cities, writing, coinage, empires, science and industry?

Hardly a new question in the annals of human thought. But the question acquires a poignancy in the reader's mind through its position in the book, which has by now explored the vastness of the human experience—the hunter gatherer's life, the agricultural revolution, the scientific revolution. Though seemingly naïve, it is *the* fundamental question that all seven billion members of the species are now grappling with in one way or another, and it comes as a cognitive and visceral shock to the reader to be confronted with it in the face of the collective human experience as laid out in *Sapiens*.

Harari considers various answers to the happiness problem, the most provocative of which is the chemical solution. No one responds to "life events"; all we respond to is the flow of various chemicals throughout our

organism and to neural events in the brain ("Nobody is ever made happy by winning the lottery, buying a house, getting a promotion...People are made happy by one thing and one thing only—pleasant sensations in their bodies.") Why not therefore simply pop a pill to keep us permanently happy (Huxley's solution in *Brave New World*)? One of the nicest aspects of *Sapiens* is its refreshingly non-moralistic tone; Harari takes apart this argument clinically and sceptically without ever preaching to his audience. Happiness is not, obviously, merely chemical; it is also about, "seeing one's life in its entirety as meaningful and worthwhile." Even this rather neat package, however, is held up to scrutiny by the author. A medieval peasant believed in the "promise of everlasting bliss in the afterlife," and this is what gave his life meaning and made it worthwhile. Is happiness then just a matter of "synchronising one's personal delusions of meaning with the prevailing collective delusions"? It is a tough pill to swallow, but we must all certainly ask of ourselves, and particularly in our educational contexts, whether our pet notions of the meanings of life, whatever they may be, are not merely personal and collective delusions. This is the kind of invitation to a risky exploration that makes *Sapiens* such an exhilarating read.

The 'solution', in the author's view, is to 'know thyself', to begin to understand our inner nature. Taking a Buddhist approach, Harari meditates upon the futility of pursuing our impermanent feelings ("When the pursuit stops, the mind becomes very relaxed, clear and satisfied".) When the entire book is considered in this light, it becomes possible to view the essence of the human experience, both historical and personal, as structured by our conditioning. The *possibility* of examining our conditioning and being free from it is presented as a real one:

> The resulting serenity is so profound that those who spend their lives in the frenzied pursuit of pleasant feelings can hardly imagine it. It is like a man standing for decades on the seashore, embracing certain 'good' waves and trying to prevent them from disintegrating, while simultaneously pushing back 'bad' waves to prevent them from getting near him. Day in, day out, the man stands on the beach, driving himself crazy with this fruitless exercise. Eventually, he sits down on the sand and just allows the waves to come and go as they please. How peaceful!

Importantly, Harari does not confuse this possibility of attention with New Age movements that have recently flooded the markets and which use, superficially, the same language. Indeed, he suggests that liberal thinking has actually distorted the possibility of attention, interpreting it

as "connecting with your inner feelings," whereas we must actually consider the insight that true wellbeing "may be independent of inner feelings."

Apart from the possibility of learning about ourselves, the other core insight of the book to me is that we live, at every level possible, in imagined realities. Whether we look at money, or the law, or social status differentiation, or nationhood, or gender, or indeed any of the multitude of the aspects of personal and social life that humans live, fight and die for, these are in a very real sense, human constructs. Others have made this point before, but it is presented in consistent and creative ways in *Sapiens*, to the point that it becomes difficult to walk in the street without being overwhelmed by the sense of the imagined order across many dimensions.

> How do you cause people to believe in an imagined order such as Christianity, democracy or capitalism? First, you never admit that the order is imagined. You always insist that the order sustaining society is an objective reality created by the great gods or by the laws of nature. People are unequal, not because Hammurabi said so, but because Enlil and Marduk decreed it. People are equal, not because Thomas Jefferson said so, but because God created them that way. Free markets are the best economic system, not because Adam Smith said so, but because these are the immutable laws of nature.

Harari considers three important ways in which these imagined orders are maintained as fictions across societies. First, "the imagined order is embedded in the material world." In other words, our houses, our classrooms and temples embody various aspects of this order. Second, "the imagined order shapes our desires":

> For instance, the most cherished desires of present-day Westerners are shaped by romantic, nationalist, capitalist and humanist myths that have been around for centuries. Friends giving advice often tell each other, 'Follow your heart.' But the heart is a double agent that usually takes its instructions from the dominant myths of the day, and the very recommendation to 'Follow your heart' was implanted in our minds by a combination of nineteenth-century Romantic myths and twentieth-century consumerist myths...

Finally, the imagined order is 'inter-subjective' meaning that it exists across human consciousness and not merely in the individual. Even if I can be 'personally' free, I still live in a society in which the imagined order prevails. Harari reaches the rather gloomy conclusion that we can never be free of

the imagined order; when we break down the walls of one order, we merely move into a larger prison.

When the two core insights of the book are taken together and we read *Sapiens* in their light, a wholly different perspective on human history and the human psyche comes to view. We are massively conditioned; our conditioning is what has created human history and society as it exists today; it is possible to be attentive to our conditioning and to be free of craving. There is a global perspective in these insights, and the wealth of detail in *Sapiens* serves to illustrate them with sensitivity and humour, in an affectionate yet detached tone. In a way, *Sapiens* must be re-read rather than merely read, for it is only then that both the core insights and the supporting details stand out.

The quote at the beginning of this review is actually the final sentence of *Sapiens*. As much as he is concerned about our past, Harari is also concerned about our future as a species. As we become technologically enhanced beings, will we strive for immortality? What possibilities will genetic engineering open up in the human realm? He is not optimistic about our future as discontented gods.

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G Gautama

Teaching Tales, Learning Trails (2018)

Edited by Neeraja Raghavan, Vineeta Sood, Kamala Anil Kumar

Notion Press

This is an unusual book—with snapshots of experiences of people, students, teachers and parents, in school, out of school and with themselves—that takes the reader on an enquiry into everyday issues of teaching, learning, schooling and more. It has anecdotes and stories, all conveyed in a conversational style, through the diary entries of individuals or mails and letters that individuals share with each other. While one may be tempted to call it a book for teachers, it is not a book just for teachers. Life and learning are one, and this book is about the discoveries of people like you and me, whether teacher, parent or child.

The style of presentation makes the book easily readable and helps one approach bigger questions with a light touch, one that is usually found in skilful writing for children. This may not be accidental as all three authors-cum-editors have vast experience with children, schools, parents and education. It is interesting to see a refreshingly similar approach used in a book largely meant for adults.

The book opens with teacher chatter, and the sharing of perceptions, questions and dilemmas by teachers. Without getting pedantic, it points to the preoccupations of teachers, all too human that enter into their work and are an inevitable part of life at school. It gently points to the learning possible if one is open to a senior colleague or retired teacher. The contemporary dilemmas regarding the place of the computers in education are also creatively met in this chapter. Through this chapter one also encounters a widely prevalent reality—fear of speaking among colleagues. It points to the paradox of school where teachers may love children, but are often wary of colleagues.

The next chapter has a new principal attempting to create contexts for reflective learning among teachers on the issues they face daily—corrections, parents, subjects, and learning that is 'encouraged by small victories'. Teachers and principals could learn much from the slow, reflective, inclusive and non-pedantic approach of Shalini Gupta, so simply expressed—small changes, small victories, small shifts that administrators and teachers work for, not knowing, never certain, that it will all add up and be worthwhile for the individual and the child. This brave endeavour, on a daily and annual basis, is what separates the teacher who finds energy and well-being in this situation from one who has settled into cynicism.

The next four chapters boldly flesh out the barriers students experience if they wish to pursue art, dance and craft, as well as barriers to the acceptance of their beings if they are seen as different from the norm. Through the lens of students, teachers, head of school and parents, all in communication through conversations, letters and reflections, the journeys portray dilemmas and solutions that leave one whole. Reading these chapters, one experiences the multiple approaches that well-intentioned parents and teachers may draw upon for solving the difficulties they encounter. It demands humility, awareness of one's predilections and willingness to drop one's guard and move towards a gentler less end-oriented approach to teaching and learning. The reader may discover suddenly that he or she is in the story being

narrated, not as a listener, but both as a listener and a participant. The value of relatedness in the moment, buried in all these stories, takes a further turn in one of these chapters, with the issues of special needs education, of responding to children with learning difficulties. Repeatedly, gently, and through the exchanges, these narratives point to the need for a dignified and non-judgemental relatedness between child and adult. All through these chapters the support that adults derive from each other is also shown in many ways.

The next two chapters deal with the binaries created by testing and exams, success and failure and the inevitable demands of becoming. Tensions, fears and anxieties that may be familiar to many a reader come alive in the narratives. Staff meetings in most schools are dull rituals that one has to get through. In one of the chapters, 'The stuff of staff meetings', one of the authors dips into the memory of a different kind of encounter in her school, which opens creative approaches that invite teachers, as a collective, to learning about being a teacher. One may be tempted to ask whether drawing teachers in, to take ownership and responsibility, is really so complex and difficult.

'Winter Sun Reveries' ends the first section of the book on bigger questions of life's journey that are difficult to answer definitively. The writer questions the purpose of education and its praxis with respect to the individual's sense of well-being and discovery. Why does one get educated? Why does one enter school teaching? Does it really have any meaning? Many of these may have been encountered by the reader earlier.

Section Two tries to gather in the ripples that the book creates when students, teachers and parents read the material contained in the book and speak their thoughts to each other. Not only does it act as a summarising device for points articulated by the group, it allows for a digestion of the issues unfolded. It is refreshing to see a new approach—people whose thoughts and stories contributed to the book, reflected here, and added to the insights of the authors.

Many a reader will be able to connect to these stories, the pains, the struggles, the challenges one encountered and the little considerations that made a difference, the people that affirmed one's being. This is a book that portrays hope and a solutions oriented approach to the dilemmas of being a parent or teacher, and makes teaching a humane career worth following. The challenges and the answers are not pat unidimensional

formulations; the complexity is unravelled through humble sharing, listening and learning together with colleagues.

If there is one single major point the book draws our attention to, it is the need for a teacher to be engaged without losing hope, being emotionally available to children, and in a learning mode. It also seems to suggest that if individuals, teachers or parents, collaborate in spirit and letter, a good education for children in possible.

The book is set amidst the middle and upper middle class ethos and therefore does not carry narratives from the more economically disadvantaged sections of India. Since the narratives are lodged within a particular strata of society, this may make it difficult for some readers to connect with the specific characters. This shortcoming is offset by the fact that many of the issues are similar in all types of schools—whether for the rich or the poor.

There is one other question one may ask at the end of the book. Is there a role for the teacher and the school beyond affirmation of the being of the child, and whether life and education is mostly about this? If children could be given unfettered choice with regard to subjects they learn, and be supported by caring adults and a conducive atmosphere, would that be all? As a teacher in a Krishnamurti school, one may ask, "what about the religious dimension, or enquiry into the fundamental questions? When, where and how would one create opportunities for that?" This question is not to take away from the inviting beauty of the stories and the directions pointed out by the book, but to become aware of the human mind's capacity to settle.

Lastly, the book, while being readable and approachable, also provides case study material that offers rich opportunities for discussion and learning, especially for the contexts of teacher development and teacher education. It points to the individual as a creative participant in the daily life of the child and school. *Teaching Tales, Learning Trails* is a valuable addition to the literature available on teaching, learning, and being human, and the authors deserve appreciation for finding a new teaching-learning trail.

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www.journal.kfionline.org
www.kfionline.org
www.jkrishnamurti.org

Copy-edited by Seema Sreenivas, Sahyadri School
Original design by Deepa Kamath, Hong Kong
Designed and typeset by Malvika Mehra, Chennai
Printed at Sudarsan Graphics, 4/641, 12th Link Street, 3rd Cross Road, Nehru Nagar, Kottivakkam, Chennai - 600 041
Cover printed on recycled paper

JOURNAL OF THE KRISHNAMURTI SCHOOLS
No 23, 2019

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